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JUDAISM

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TALKING BACK TO THE BOSS: JEWS AND AUTHORITY

Loren E. Lomasky

EXILE AND REDEMPTION: A SECULAR ZIONIST VIEW

Ben Halpern

ISRAEL AND THE THIRD WORLD

Susan Aurelia Gitelson

THE WISE MEN OF HELM

Israel Knox

ISSUE No. 114 / VOLUME 29 / NUMBER 2 / \$2.75 **SPRING 1980**

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS

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JUDAISM, conceived as a free and non-partisan organ, is dedicated to the creative discussion and exposition of the religious, moral and philosophical concepts of Judaism and their relevance to the problems of modern society. Through an exploration of the meaning and needs of the Jewish experience, it hopes to widen the channels of communication between Jews and to affirm Jewish verity and vitality to the world at large.

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JUDAISM: A QUARTERLY JOURNAL is published by the American Jewish Congress. It appears in January, April, July and October. Office of Publication: 15 East 84th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028. Re-entered as second-class matter at Post Office, New York City, N.Y. Subscription in the United States and Canada, \$10.00 for one year, \$18.00 for two years, \$25.00 for three years; foreign subscription, \$11.00 for one year, \$20.00 for two years, \$28.00 for three years. Special rate for bulk (10 or more) and student subscriptions, \$6.00. Single issue, \$2.75; single issue abroad, \$3.00. Make checks payable to the order of JUDAISM, and send to 15 East 84th Street, New York, N.Y. 10028. Allow six weeks for notice of change of address.

US ISSN 0022-5762

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JUDAISM

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

Authority as a Binding Element

The discovery of a *Leit-motif*, a basic strand running through the historical experience of the Jewish people, has long been an objective of historians, philosophers and theologians. The task has become more difficult in the modern period because of the recognition of development and change as characteristic of all living organisms and the rise of religious and cultural pluralism. Nonetheless, the quest goes on.

Loren E. Lomasky suggests that the one theme uniting all ages and all groups in Jewish history is its response to authority and its insistence that the sovereign power, human and Divine, must be answerable before the bar of morality. In the words addressed by Abraham to God, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?"

In his paper, "Talking Back to the Boss: Jews and Authority," he maintains that this attitude continues to unite contemporary Jews with their past and is the bond between secularists and religious believers.

The Transformation of Peretz

Y.L. Peretz is more than a great Jewish writer. He is one of the architects of modern Yiddish. The key to the understanding of his later work lies in his transformation from being an advocate of Haskalah and modernism to his immersion in traditional Jewish life in Poland. This was the result of a trip he took as a demographer, early in his career.

In his paper, "Peretz Among The Jews," Richard J. Fein traces Peretz's early years and his first contact with the *shtetl*. He compares Peretz's spiritual odyssey with the contacts that the great German-Jewish poet, Heinrich Heine and the gifted Russian-Jewish writer, Isaak Babel, had with the same pattern of traditional Jewish life.

Jews Are Still Liberal

It is being increasingly noted today — though the evidence is by no means decisive — that the current of political conservatism in American life is running strongly and that liberalism is on the defensive. The claim is being put forth that American Jews are reflecting the same trend to the right. A few years ago (Winter, 1972), we published a symposium in JUDAISM entitled, "Jews and Liberalism — Marriage, Separation or Divorce," in which the symposiasts presented various responses to the question expressed in the title.

Stephen J. Whitfield maintains that the long-standing bias of American Jews for liberal positions is still alive and well. In his paper, "The 'Bourgeois Humanism' of American Jews," he cites evidence to support

his contention that American Jews still remain more responsive than other segments of the American people to such ideals as the basic freedoms of the Bill of Rights, racial equality, economic justice and personal liberty.

Another Look at the Megillah

The books of the Bible continue to reveal virtually limitless levels of meaning to scholars, thinkers and sensitive readers generally. On the surface, the book of Esther would seem to be a straight-forward account of an anti-Semitic plot to destroy the Jewish people, successfully foiled by the heroism and wisdom of Mordecai and Esther. Yet a deeper study of the book reveals unsuspected layers of meaning. These are examined by *Jonathan Magonet* in "The Liberal and The Lady: Esther Revisited."

Not Who, but How is a Jew?

In her paper, "The Zionist Thought of Ben Halpern" (*JUDAISM*, Summer 1978), Sharon Miller summarized the thought of this distinguished spokesman for secular Zionism in America. She also raised a series of questions with regard to his philosophy. At the invitation of the Editor of this journal, Professor Halpern has now prepared a response, setting forth his personal credo in "Exile and Redemption: A Secular Zionist View."

Readers will find his paper full of striking *aperçus*. Basically, the author denies that there is any specific body of ideological content or any code of practice, however broadly and liberally construed, that constitutes "the essence of Judaism." What makes Jews Jewish is their possession of a symbol-set that is uniquely Jewish, being derived from their own historic civilization. Not the content of Judaism but its symbols unite modern Jews with each other and with their past. One remains a Jew so long as one does not abandon these symbols, be they concepts, acts or objects, which Mordecai Kaplan would call the sancta of Jewish civilization.

The issues are so fundamental that the Editor cannot resist entering the discussion. Halpern's treatment of the subject is carried through with great thoroughness and consistency, but it leaves many issues unanswered.

To cite a few, will the preservation of a set of symbols be sufficient to win young Jews, particularly those living in an open, free, society for loyalty to their Jewish identity? For even in a democratic society, being a Jew entails the assumption of many burdens and the sacrifice of many prerogatives, many of which can be avoided by assimilation. Will the acceptance of a set of common symbols alone, which by Halpern's definition do not represent a common core of content, be sufficient to forge world Jewish unity for a people living under conditions radically different in Israel and within the various lands of the Dispersion?

Is it true, as Halpern maintains, that "Israel cannot but be authentically Jewish in the degree that it confronts its own problems honestly?" At the risk of being simplistic, would other ethnic groups become "Jewish" if they followed the same prescription of being "honest"?

Halpern is well aware that the early pioneers in Israel, largely recruited from Labor Zionist ranks, found it easy to establish "a ready identification with Israel's prophetic tradition." He concedes that the present generation of Israelis, who are the children and the grandchildren of the pioneers, no longer find that identification so easy or so congenial. He attributes the change to the increasingly complicated situation in which Israel and its people find themselves. But is it not possible that the reason for the change is that the earlier pioneers, however rebellious against the religious tradition, were nevertheless close enough to draw upon it? This situation no longer prevails today.

Halpern argues cogently that the idea of the Dispersion as a Jewish mission, adopted by early Reform, is an "inauthentic idea . . . false to Jewish history." But what of the idea of a *function* for the Dispersion, a role in the world for the Jewish people even outside the land of Israel? After all, the Talmud does record the view of Rabbi Eliezer, "The Holy One, blessed be He, exiled Israel among the nations, so that proselytes might be added to them" (*Pesaḥim* 87b).

Finally, Halpern concedes that the symbol-sets that constitute the unique element in the Jewish patrimony are religious in origin and character. May it not be argued that without a religious foundation the Jewish ethos cannot survive and that even secular Jews can find the basis for their Jewish belonging in the religious component of Jewishness? This was the contention a few decades ago of the American Labor Zionist sociologist, Bezalel Sherman, in his Yiddish and English writings.

But the Editor finds himself engaged in a polemic with one of his most respected contributors. This will never do. It might stimulate the writing of another excellent paper by the author of "Exile and Redemption."

Who Are The Foolish Ones?

No area of recent Jewish folklore has been more popular than "the people of Helm." While many of the tales concerning this Jewish "Gotham" have been rendered into English, the entire corpus of stories is still little known and less understood.

In "The Wise Men of Helm," *Israel Knox* analyzes some of the philosophic and psychological implications of this unique treasure.

Israel and the Third World

In the dizzying world of change in which we live, with new and

unpredictable developments taking place almost daily, it may seem foolhardy for a quarterly journal to undertake to publish material on current events. This is particularly true with regard to Israel, where we are plunged almost daily "from the uttermost heights to the lowest depths," though we know that all the public pronouncements and news reports represent only the tip of an iceberg.

Nevertheless, there are some constants in the situation, such as Israel's need for allies and supporters in the international arena. During the first decades of its history, Israel expended a great deal of its material and human resources in assistance to the Third World. This was not only an act of beneficence to the "have-not" nations, an imperative flowing from the Jewish tradition; it was part of an enlightened policy of self-interest designed to win friends for Israel in the councils of nations.

Unfortunately, these tremendous investments of men and materials in Asia and, above all, in Africa proved unable to stem the tide of violent anti-Israel sentiment in the United Nations that was fed by the relentless propaganda and the stick-and-carrot policy of the Arab states.

In her paper, "Evolving Relations Between Israel and the Third World," *Susan Aurelia Gitelson* surveys the history of Israel's relations with the developing nations. She suggests that the last chapter has not yet been written and that the fruits of this endeavor may yet prove to be more beneficial than has been feared in the past.

Kaplan and Tradition

The great Jewish religious thinker, Mordecai M. Kaplan, who will celebrate his ninety-ninth birthday on June 11th, 1980, remains a most powerful influence in the American-Jewish community. While the official Reconstructionist movement is limited in numbers, it has been remarked, with a substantial measure of truth, that most American Jews are Reconstructionists in their outlook with regard to the character of Judaism and the Jewish people.

On the other hand, many of those in recent years who have consciously opted for a religious way of life have tended to regard Kaplan as primarily a sociologist of the Jewish community rather than as a philosopher of Judaism. In many quarters, his reinterpretations of such basic concepts as God, Israel and Torah have been regarded as so radical as to be beyond the purview of the normative Jewish tradition.

In his paper, "The God of Mordecai Kaplan," *David Brusin* maintains that Kaplan's ideas, their modern reformulation notwithstanding, are far closer to the tradition than is usually recognized. Kaplan's links are with the Biblical and Rabbinic worldview rather than with the theology of the medieval rationalist philosophers and their modern successors.

What Does The Future Hold?

The phenomenon of Jewish survival continues to intrigue the world. Theologians and philosophers, scholars and laymen find the ongoing existence of the Jewish people, however difficult the conditions, extraordinary. Some, including the Editor of this journal, call it miraculous.

A distinguished American-Jewish scholar, now resident in Israel, *Abraham S. Halkin*, subjects this commonly held article of belief to stringent analysis. His sober reflections on "Jewish Survival" merit serious and prayerful consideration.

The Holocaust Can Be Understood

While, on the one hand, the literature on the Holocaust continues to mount and courses on this greatest of all horrors continue to proliferate, we are assured by influential voices that the Holocaust is "incomprehensible," that it is not susceptible to analysis, that it cannot be studied in terms of historical cause and effect and, in fact, it "transcends history."

The Nazis may fairly be described as beasts in human form, but the demonic interpretation of the Holocaust is not only intellectually questionable but pragmatically dangerous. If Hitlerism has no identifiable causes, then mankind stands forever helpless before another outbreak of this moral epidemic.

In his paper, "The, Incomprehensibility, of the Holocaust: Tightening Up Some Loose Usage," *Dan Magurshak* carefully analyzes the range of meanings of the term "incomprehensible." He indicates in what sense the term may be legitimately applied to the horrors of the Holocaust and which uses of the word are to be avoided, because they obscure a subject on which we need ever more light.

I believe that this paper is one of the few truly significant contributions to the recent literature on the Holocaust.

R. G.

Talking Back to the Boss: Jews and Authority

LOREN E. LOMASKY

I

EXTEND A GLASS ROD INDEFINITELY AND IT will snap of its own weight. The history of a people can display a similar phenomenon. When it stretches over millennia, one may find few, if any, links connecting its latter manifestations to its distant past. The Egypt of the Pharaohs is not that of Sadat, and Caesar's Gaul bears little resemblance to modern France.

Although Jewish history extends more than thirty centuries, there nonetheless persists a general conviction among Jews that the temporally disparate parts of this long tradition retain some inherent unifying bond. But a central problem posed by that conviction is to provide some reasonably specific and defensible statement concerning the nature of that alleged continuity. Exacerbating this problem is the fact that the modern era has been one of increasing secularization among Jews. The normative consensus forged by the Pharisees has finally broken down. Both in the Diaspora and in Israel only a minority classify themselves as observant. Could this finally be the decisive rupture in the protracted Jewish saga? Salo Baron gives us some reason to think that it is, in the opening remarks of his magisterial *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*:

For the Jews, as such, their religio-cultural heritage is all the more vital, because they have so long lacked the basic elements of human group life — territory, state, and language . . . The many schismatic movements among Jews usually broke off from the main body of Jewry, and, sooner or later, the people and its religion were once again coextensive.¹

I do not deny that the most obvious sign of Jewish persistence through the ages has been an abiding adherence to the demands of Torah, however those demands have been understood. What I shall argue in this paper, though, is that, even where *tallit* and *tefillin* have been shed, Jews remain a distinctive presence within the societies in which they dwell.² I believe that significant veins of continuity *can* be detected running through the Jewish experience, even across the Great Secular Divide.

1. Second Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), Volume I, pp. 3-4.

2. Sociological analyses of Jewish distinctiveness are voluminous. Their significance is well captured by Milton Himmelfarb in *The Jews of Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). See, especially, the essays in Section II, "Off the Graph."

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And while the Hebrew civilization is far too subtle and complex to be identified with any one factor, I contend that central to it — and, arguably, the most crucial single motif — is the Jewish response to authority. This theme has received insufficient attention in the scholarly literature. Authority, like death and taxes, is always with us. Every nation is understandable, in part, by virtue of the patterns of authority that it experiences and the manner in which it strives to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate authority. It will be argued that the concept of rightful authority has been remarkably constant throughout recorded Jewish history and that it has possessed enormous motivating power in all times and places that Jews have known. To a greater extent than some may realize, Jews are heirs to their past insofar as they demand that authority give a rational account of itself.

II

The religion of Israel recognizes one God, Creator of Heaven and Earth. Therefore, its focus of authority is clear and unambiguous. Other ancient cults posited a pantheon of irreducibly diverse sources of power that, in principle, could come into conflict. Indeed, ancient myths regularly attributed many of the calamities visited upon human beings to cosmic warfare among superhuman personages. Nor is this an obviously irrational way imaginatively to reconstruct phenomena; the natural order does not intuitively present itself as a harmonious, well-ordered system. Ancient man eked out a precarious life amid raw and uncontrollable forces of nature. Storm and flood, one season grudgingly dying as another was born, were the backdrop to human efforts that could easily prove to be futile. At best, one could hope to discriminate among and propitiate the various deities without making other gods jealous. A delicate balancing act was required, and it rendered inconceivable any unitary source of authority.

For some unexplained and perhaps inexplicable reason, ancient Israel responded to the world by adopting a radically different conceptual framework. Monotheism automatically provided a *de facto* source of ultimate rulership. God, and only God, had the untrammelled power to compel total allegiance. But, just as importantly, this rulership was conceived to be benign and penetrable by human reason. That is, it could also be comprehended as legitimate *de jure*. The all-powerful Creator was, in addition, the just and merciful king. Since His edicts had a moral base, they were not inscrutable to the perceptive conscience.

This conception marked a profound intellectual advance. It held up the possibility that events could be not only endured, but also understood. Like contemporary scientific theories, it posited lawful regularities underlying the flux of phenomena. Unlike these scientific theories, it held that the regularities are not merely causal but teleologically established; that is,

they are conducive to promoting ends inherent in the universe. For the purposes of this discussion, the similarities are more important than the differences. Both science and the religion of Israel attempt to make sense of the world by subsuming an infinity of particular events under a manageable small number of theoretical concepts and laws. We take this process for granted today, but at its inception it was a dazzlingly bold enterprise. Both in Jerusalem and, several centuries later, in Athens, models were constructed of a teleologically well-ordered world and they still fuel Western civilization.

It was the unique genius of the Hebrews to fuse the concepts of power and morality within the notion of authority. While this produced a more comprehensive account of reality than had previously been attained, it was not an altogether secure synthesis. No pronouncement was immune from questioning simply on the grounds that it emanated from someone who occupied a position of power. A king could compel unjustly, but in such cases he did not possess genuine authority. One prime role of the prophets was to rebuke kings who overstepped their proper bounds. The *Tanakh* is replete with examples, from Samuel's deposition of Saul to the end of the monarchy in Judea. (I shall return to this theme in Section III.) Authority, to be recognized, had to be continually justified, and the justification presupposed a universal and immutable moral law. No one was so mighty that he could stand aloof from its demands.

Classical Jewish sources reiterate this point in dramatic fashion. Even God Himself is bound by the standards that He has mandated. Abraham's dialogue with God over the impending destruction of Sodom illustrates this view clearly:

Wilt thou really sweep away good and bad together? Suppose there are fifty good men in the city; wilt thou really sweep it away, and not pardon the place because of the fifty good men? Far be it from thee to do this — to kill good and bad together; for then the good would suffer with the bad. Far be it from thee. Shall not the judge of the earth do what is just?³

Ultimately, of course, Abraham extracts the concession that even for the sake of ten righteous men God will spare the city.

This famous passage can easily be misconstrued. It may appear to be nothing more than a typical case of Middle Eastern bargaining, with Abraham holding out for the best terms that he can get. This analysis, however, cannot be correct for at least two reasons. First, Abraham is not pursuing his own self-interest. (This is part of an explanation as to why, in Genesis 22, Abraham does not attempt to argue God out of demanding the sacrifice of Isaac.) Second, and most important, bargaining is ruled out because there is nothing that Abraham can possibly offer as a consideration to induce divine leniency!

There is a better way to make sense of the dialogue, and that is to read

3. Genesis 18:23-5. All Biblical citations are the translation of the *New English Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

it as an illustration of the *moral* — and, hence, rationally discernible — foundation of authority. No human being can hope to confront God on the terrain of raw power, but because God has established the world as a moral order, reason can prescribe imperatives that are universally applicable. There is no presumption in Genesis (or, I would maintain, elsewhere in the Bible) that human beings can *correct* God's decrees; since the moral order is God's creation, the rules to which those like Abraham appeal are always intrinsically God's commands. Rather, Abraham is privileged to understand the fabric of justice that runs through creation and to affirm its precepts even to the constructor of that fabric. He performs a genuine *imitatio dei* that at once confirms the dignity of man and recognizes the legitimacy of God's overlordship.

"Shall not the judge of the earth do what is just?" Would Abraham venture to ask such a question if he were not secure in knowing what its answer must be? Indeed, each of the many questions that he puts is rhetorical and the answer predictable. *Of course* God will not sweep away good and bad together — even though ordinary human experience seems to reveal distressingly many instances in which good and bad suffer the same fate! It is, thus, the duty — and the glory — of human beings to affirm the moral regularity of creation even in the face of God's most extreme wrath. Moses does so (Exodus 32) when Israel is threatened with total obliteration for the sin of the Golden Calf. And when human beings fail to argue for divine mercy in the face of impending judgment, the result is displeasing to God and disastrous for man. This is most clearly displayed in Ezekiel 22:30-31. After running through a lengthy list of depravities current in Jerusalem, God caps the indictment by informing the prophet:

I looked for a man among them who could build up a barricade, who could stand before me in the breach to defend the land from ruin; but I found no such man. I poured out my indignation upon them and utterly destroyed them in the fire of my wrath.

It is the prophets' job to stand in the breach, and throughout the period of prophetic Judaism they did so. Because a breach has two sides, their role is correspondingly two-fold. Half of the task involves pleading man's case before God, as Abraham does. The other half is, of course, to stress God's demands for moral behavior in front of an often obdurate and unhearing nation. The first of the literary prophets, Amos, reports that God rejects the sacrifices and chanting of a corrupt people, demanding instead, "Let justice roll on like a river/and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," (5:24). Isaiah (1:10-16) and Jeremiah (7:22-23) reiterate this demand and, indeed, it becomes a staple within the prophetic tradition. It is a controversial question whether any of the prophets entirely reject sacrifice, but, clearly, they unanimously disavow the model of propitiating an autocratic divinity. Micah adds that man has been given to *know* what is good: "Only to act justly, to love loyalty, to walk wisely

before your God," (6:8). Because human beings can understand the moral structure of the world, they are obliged to exemplify it in their actions.⁴

The Rabbis follow their prophetic ancestors in stressing the intelligibility of the moral order, but they advance even beyond them in underlining the power of human practical reason. In a striking metaphor, God is depicted as studying Torah within the Heavenly Academy as the sages do in their academies (*Baba Mezia* 85b, 86a). Again, one must be careful not to underestimate the significance of this passage. The Rabbis' intent is surely not to claim that God imitates man, but, rather, that we have the prerogative of undertaking activity that partakes of a transcendent value.

Radical insistence on the autonomy of reason lies behind an exchange between Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and his colleagues during the first century of the Common Era:

On a certain occasion R. Eliezer used all possible arguments to substantiate his opinion, but the Rabbis did not accept it. He said, "If I am right may this carob tree move a hundred yards from its place." It did so . . . They said, "From a tree no proof can be brought." Then he said, "May the canal prove it." The water of the canal flowed backwards. They said, "Water cannot prove anything." . . . Then R. Eliezer said, "If I am right, let the heavens prove it." Then a heavenly voice said, "What have you against R. Eliezer? The Halakhah is always with him." Then R. Joshua [b. Hannaniah] got up and said, "It is not in heaven" (Deuteronomy 30:12). What did he mean by this? R. Jeremiah said, "The Law was given us from Sinai. We pay no attention to a heavenly voice. For already from Sinai the Law said, 'By a majority you are to decide'" (Exodus 23:2). R. Nathan met Elijah and asked him what God did in that hour. Elijah replied, "He laughed and said, 'My children have conquered me.'"⁵

Surely this must be one of the most remarkable passages in all of Rabbinic literature! It is awash in splendid irony: R. Eliezer seems to be vindicated by every means that a theistic imagination could suggest; at every turn he is countered. A succession of miraculous departures from the ordinary course of nature is climactically followed by an unambiguous divine voice. Nonetheless, the pious R. Joshua is unmoved. His objection is decisive, while Eliezer is subsequently excommunicated by the Rabbis. Finally, rather than show anger, God rejoices in his failure to sway the assembled sages! The anthropomorphic naivete of this last element emphasizes the audacity of the conception.

4. Perhaps the most striking Biblical discussion of the moral authority of human reason pervades the Book of Job. Job's three pious friends promote a theodicy which restricts the privilege of protesting injustice. In spite of their orthodox religiosity, they are vehemently condemned. Indeed, it is a commonplace of Biblical scholarship that the insistence of Job's language posed grave difficulties for its eventual canonization. These observations provide further support for the thesis of this paper, but there is another side to Job: human reason is presented as radically — even tragically — *insufficient* to penetrate the moral order of the cosmos. This deeply rooted *ambiguity* of Job makes it one of the most difficult books of the Bible, and I here merely note it without attempting a resolution.

5. *Baba Mezia* 59b. The translation is that of C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), pp. 340-1.

R. Joshua rejects supernatural signs as a basis for judgment, not because he doubts the possibility of divine communications but because they are irrelevant to the process of decision. Why are miracles and heavenly voices unwelcome intrusions into the domain of Rabbinic activity? Surely it is not merely that they reinforce an otherwise undesirable opinion; that would be to narrow unwarrantedly the import of R. Joshua's objection. Rather, both miracles and divine intervention upset the ordinary functioning of the natural order and, thus, human efforts to comprehend that order. What security can even the most scrupulous halakhic reasoning possess if it is susceptible at any moment to being overturned by unpredicted and unpredictable intervention from a sphere which is beyond rational calculation? From the point of view of the Rabbis, such extraordinary occurrences are disruptive surds which subtly undermine the enterprise in which they are engaged.⁶ A continuing series of piecemeal revelations is superfluous and unwelcome precisely because thought itself, in an entirely satisfactory manner, can continue the process of revelation that commenced at Sinai. That is why God rejoices at his "defeat." He created both Torah and reason; it is the latter which is designed to reveal progressively the dictates of the former. One can almost hear the Rabbis exclaim, "Thank God for the one Torah from Sinai — and thank God there is *only* one Torah!"

It is hardly feasible even to begin to list the almost endless line of notable Jewish scholars and sages who, in language suitable for their ages, have reaffirmed this conception of the universe as a rationally intelligible order. As has been shown above, halakhic exegesis presupposes the authority of properly guided reason and, therefore, of necessity, the mainstream of Rabbinic thought profoundly reflects this authority. And when Jews begin to philosophize in the fashion of the Arabic and Christian intelligentsia, they render explicit what was, in any event, never far from the surface. To note only the two most significant Medieval philosophers, both Saadia in the 10th century (*Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*, Chapter III) and Maimonides in the 13th (*Guide of the Perplexed*, Book III, Chapter 26) stress the elevated role of reason. Although they disagree between themselves on the relative weights to be assigned to reason and revelation in the process of discovering *mizvot*, the disagreement occurs within a broad consensus that posits a highly intelligible moral order.

Consider, finally, that unique genius, Baruch Spinoza, called by some the first truly modern philosopher. He may seem to stand outside of this survey by virtue of his setting himself apart from all of his predecessors in the Jewish tradition in rejecting the authority of any revelation. But though he was expelled from the Amsterdam Jewish community by his horrified contemporaries, in retrospect he appears to us as being distinctly Jewish — and a precursor of much to come. One must turn to

6. An excellent exposition of their attitude is found in Max Kadushin's *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 152-167.

Harry Wolfson⁷ for a full account of how thoroughly Spinoza is enmeshed within the Jewish tradition. Here I shall content myself with one remark concerning his unparalleled *Ethics*. In that work he assumes that the intellect, unaided by either supernatural assistance or sense perception, can delineate the fundamental structure of all reality as well as prescribe the optimum way of life for man. Perhaps never before nor since⁸ in Western thought has any philosopher expressed such unbounded confidence in the scope of human reason. Is it merely a coincidence that this paramount rationalist is also a Jew?

III

To a varying extent the Jews of modernity are children of both Rabbis and of Spinoza. Secularism has affected some more deeply than others, and today there is no one tradition of normative religious expression embraced by the entire community. Nonetheless, there is an important continuity evinced in Jewish attitudes toward authority. Since Abraham, Jews have overwhelmingly maintained that there is an intelligible moral order that can, and should, govern action. Although many no longer attribute it to the creative efficacy of an all-powerful deity, Jews continue to insist that reality match up to ideals of justice and human fellowship. Such was the case for the Literary Prophets, but also for Bundists in Czarist Russia and civil rights marchers in Selma. I have no wish to argue that each of the dismayingly many ways in which Jews pursue social change is equally worthy; rather, I believe that some are wrongheaded and pernicious, neither "good for the Jews" nor for the greater society. But it can be fairly maintained that the one attitude which is distinctly *non-Jewish* is the complacent acceptance of stasis, the willingness to countenance injustice for the sake of quiet security.

Because authority is taken to be irreducibly moral, the Jewish tradition has always displayed an ambivalence to temporal sovereignty. Divine power is necessarily conjoined with divine goodness, but human power tends to be self-aggrandizing, and it regularly oversteps its rightful bounds. In a famous polemic, the seer Samuel warns Israel that the king whom they vociferously demand will commandeer their sons and daughters for his own purposes, take the best of their fields, vineyards and flocks and generally enslave the populace (I Samuel 8:11-18). Nonetheless, Samuel eventually acquiesces to the popular demand. Human beings live in societies, and an orderly social nexus requires that there be rulers to exercise authority. Sovereignty fulfills a necessary function, but its authority is always contingent on the rightful exercise of power. Samuel condemns Saul (I Samuel 15:23), Nathan chastises David (II Samuel 12:1-12) and Elijah pronounces sentence against Ahab (I

7. See his *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948).

8. The only competitor for this distinction who comes readily to mind is Parmenides of Elea, active during the 6th century B.C.E.

Kings 21:17-24) when these kings fail to live up to their charge. Throughout the span of monarchy in Israel and Judea, kings transgressed and prophets, priests and sages took them to task. While it may be inevitable that rulers will favor their own interests at the expense of the common good, the Jewish tradition never excused conduct that fell short of the rigorous demands of Torah and conscience. Nor does any representative Jewish figure ever adopt the Hobbesian position that the terrors of an anarchic state of nature are so great that *any* exercise of kingship must be accepted as preferable. Despite a procession of Israelite and Judean monarchs, of whom a few were praiseworthy but most mediocre or worse, the tradition persisted in adopting an ideal of earthly kingship that mirrors the combination of power and morality possessed by divine authority.

The ideal of perfect kingship is projected from history onto eschatology in the messianic vision. Originally, it grew out of the desire of a dispossessed people for a strong leader who could resecure for it a lost nationhood. That idea grew ever more potent in its significance to a people who were perpetually plundered and cruelly governed by foreign despots. But in its fully fleshed-out form it was not merely the expression of an irredentist wish for future might and wealth; in addition, it was intimately linked to the most grandiose moral prospectus ever conceived. Peace was to reign universally, man would no longer be prey to his baser instincts and even the dead were to be raised so that the righteous of all nations would have their earned share in the world to come. No induction from the record of actual human experience could render this vision the least bit credible. Only faith in the moral grounds undergirding genuine authority could do so.

Therefore, messianism, too, is an undeniably potent force attaching secular Jews to a tradition that, in other respects, may be largely foreign to them. But it would be a mistake to argue that messianism is the *primary motif* identifiable as connecting the Jewish past to its present. For messianism is itself, in large measure, a product of the concept of rightful authority and is, thus, posterior to it. Additionally, although every age knew of extremists who concentrated on apocalyptic expectations to the exclusion of all else, in fact, Jewish elites have generally been chary of encouraging messianic speculation.⁹ In part, their caution may be attributable to ordinary political prudence; the legacies of Bar Kokhba and Sabbethai Zevi were extraordinarily harsh. But also operative was the realistic fear that a fixation upon the glories of the world to come can distract attention from the necessity of pursuing the mundane affairs of this world.¹⁰ The moral authority of human reason is too important to be

9. See Gerson D. Cohen, "Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim (Prior to Sabbethai Zevi)," *Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture 9* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1967).

10. In *Sanhedrin* 99a, R. Hillel holds that Israel will *not* experience the messiah; they already had enjoyed his presence in the time of Hezekiah! Although this minority opinion was

displaced even by messianic hopes. One final caution on overemphasizing the legacy of messianism: if even Jewish religious elites attempt to neutralize its fascination, we ought not be too quick in supposing that it is a determining factor in the thought of secular Jews. What could account for its transmission between generations? Unless one is willing to posit some mysterious genetic mechanism, there is no good reason to suppose that messianic ideals will flourish in a secular environment any more successfully than do other particular religious doctrines. On the other hand, the moral authority of human reason is precisely the kind of attitude that we might expect would bridge successfully the transition to secularism — as was true of Spinoza.

We do not live in an age noteworthy for a surplus of faith. Doctrines and rituals that impelled our ancestors leave many of us unmoved. The Great Secular Divide that I referred to earlier has been decisively crossed, and there is little prospect that patterns of reverence that inspired Jews for more than two millenia will once again come to dominate the life of the community. But if the foregoing argument is correct, there do still obtain strong threads of continuity with the Jewish past. As much as ever, Jews still insist that the exercise of power be tempered by a moral vision. They still tend to be wary of claims to legitimacy based on nothing other than a *de facto* preponderance of force. It is, therefore, not surprising that Jews are consistently found allied to movements directed at correcting inequities in wealth, opportunity and liberty. That is not to claim that Jews are a homogeneous group which stands for some one identifiable set of policies. We may occasionally wish that that were the case, but facts are otherwise. Even where moral imperatives most closely coincide with Jewish self-interest, there is apt to be a minority which, on principle, adopts a contrary stance; one need only recall the stridently anti-Zionistic Jews who were prominent within the New Left. But even they are typically Jewish in their insistence on staking out a moral turf which they will then defend against all incursions. Karl Marx himself, despite repeated and vitriolic attacks upon the Jewish spirit which he so loathed, may have been more responsive to his Jewish antecedents than he realized. He believed — perhaps we ought to say presupposed as a matter of faith — that the messy world of social and economic phenomena could be subsumed under general scientific laws. He interpreted history not as merely an aimless succession of event upon event but as embodying a pattern that should be understood teleologically, as progress from lower to higher levels of social organization. Finally, he predicated his activity on the certainty that, eventually, a new age would be ushered in, in which unrightful domination of man by man would cease and each person would autonomously exercise full authority over himself.¹¹ Despite the sad subsequent career

rejected by his peers, it is indicative of Rabbinic attempts to downplay the undeniable fascination of messianic prognostication.

11. Does this establish that, at least for Marx, messianic fervor is the prime mover? I believe

of institutionalized Marxism, this is a vision not entirely foreign to the Jewish experience.

Where the influence of tradition is pervasive and unmistakable, there is little need for a people actively to seek out the patterns that bind them to their past. For them, the past informs their most deeply held projects and prospects. But where the impetus of tradition is perceived to be attenuated and history is not readily seen to offer guidance to current activity, it is much more necessary to try to uncover whatever connections still obtain. I have argued that a characteristic response to authority can be discerned in all stages of the Jewish experience. To the extent that it is perpetuated in future generations, they, too, will be participants in this experience. This is not to predict that divisive tendencies within the Jewish community will soon, or ever, be smoothed over and replaced by unanimity; authority can be confronted from many incompatible ideological perspectives. Nor do I claim that this attitude is the exclusive property of Jews. The gentile world has long been deeply influenced by a Jewish presence. Concepts given birth within the Jewish tradition are regularly adopted by members of surrounding cultures. It can be — and ought to be — maintained, though, that a morally derived account of authority was conceived and fleshed out by Jews, influences Jewish history at every juncture, and remains one of the most valuable gifts to civilization that has ever been offered by any people.

not. It is the dynamics of power in the empirically measurable world of production and consumption that most moves Marx, not utopian visions. His analyses of actually exercised illegitimate authority are crisp and incisive. By contrast, the withering away of the state and what follows are hazy in the extreme and represent no advance over the socialistic predecessors that he scornfully reviles.

Peretz Among The Jews

RICHARD J. FEIN

ALTHOUGH, BY 1890, YITZKHOK LEIBUSH Peretz had already published poems in Hebrew and Yiddish, he had not yet established himself as the famous writer of Yiddish tales, particularly those which drew upon and metamorphosed folk materials. Indeed, by 1890, it was not yet clear that Peretz would even choose Yiddish as the language for his art. In his famous poem "Monish," published in Sholom Aleichem's literary almanac, *Yiddish Folks Bibliotek* (1888), Peretz complained about the limits of Yiddish for literary purposes. At the same time (as Dan Miron has shown),¹ he was working his way toward a sense of Yiddish as a language suitable for literature. About a year after publishing "Monish" (with its sniping at Yiddish), Peretz, jobless and prevented by the regime from practicing as a lawyer, joined the scheme of a Warsaw philanthropist to study and report on the life of the impoverished Jews in the *shtetlakh* of Poland. That trip (or return trip) to the Jewish life of small towns was to have a profound effect on Peretz's sense of Yiddish and its folk qualities.

When Peretz began as a member of that statistical expedition in 1889, he was playing the role of the social scientist. In *Sketches of a Provincial Journey*, he begins his interviews with a *maskil*-like faith that correct statistics will demonstrate that Jews are a productive people and that such statistics will support an effort to ameliorate the Jewish condition in the Pale. However, he ends up mocking the inefficacy of the information that he is gathering. Actually, the prefatory chapter, which has the tone of an epilogue, adumbrates the skepticism that takes over Peretz as he is engaged in his task of enlightenment.

Rather than statistics and social improvements occupying his mind, he finds himself drawn to, and giving expression to, the "remedies" of the people: legends, folk beliefs, tales, multiple economic ventures, psychological and economic stealth. By the end of *Sketches* the mask of social scientist and reformer is dropped and there emerges the Jewish writer absorbing and exploiting the experience and tales of "the folk."

Not that Peretz is one with the folk whom he has come to study. His attitude toward his subjects is critical and sympathetic: critical but not carping, sympathetic but not sentimental, attached but not submissive. He is well aware of their political naivete. His comic description of the effort, by himself and two other men, to open a rabbi's dusty, putty-dried,

1. *A Traveler Disguised* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), pp. 59-63.

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sun-cracked window frame which had not been opened in fifteen years is an epiphany of his intrusion into the life of *shtetl* Jewry.

Peretz is aware that he appears as a stranger (sometimes not even as a Jew) to the Jews whom he is studying. More than once he remarks on the fear, the astonishment, even the shame (on the part of some of the women) as they see this stranger in their midst speaking Yiddish. (Peretz sometimes comes across as the visiting anthropologist who speaks the language of the natives, his own tribe re-visited.)² To some of the Jews who peer at him, Peretz represents the blemished *goyish* world. This Jewish stranger among the Jews, this German-looking transcriber would come to memorialize their life.

By the end of the sketches Peretz has stopped describing himself as *der statistiker* and is himself listening more and more to the stories, the anecdotes, the legends that are being passed on to him. This shift in his approach to his informants supports Leo Wiener's observation that what makes *Sketches of a Provincial Journey* "particularly interesting is that it is written so that it will interest those very humble people about whom he is writing."³ The book portrays Peretz's discovery of his relationship to his materials, as he absorbs the styles as well as the essence of his interviewees. If the purpose of the statistical expedition is to demonstrate that the Jews are a productive people (despite their handicaps), Peretz also discovers the story-telling productivity of these people who may hesitate or puzzle over being asked what their German name is, but who are quick to recite a story to the fact-gathering stranger or to reveal a scene or relay an anecdote which takes Peretz far beyond reportage and information-gathering. Peretz himself becomes affected, if not transformed, by the very people and materials with whom he is coming into contact. He gives himself up to their stories.

Bored with the predictable figures — give or take a ruble, add or subtract a child in the household — and knowing ahead of time that he is bound to find illegal activities — an unlicensed inn, a horse-thief or two — Peretz at one point records the comments of the people rather than the numerical information about them. Or, rather, his informants create the pathos of their own statistics. Let them be known by their own comments, Peretz indicates. Like ghostly faces swimming before him in the air, the Jews whisper to him their condition, the statistics initiating each statement of woe:

2. Peretz's 1889 return to *shtetl* Jewry may be likened to what anthropologists call being "thrice born." After being raised in a particular culture and after settling into and understanding a foreign culture, the native's return to his original culture with a renewed sense of its rhythms constitutes the third birth. In *Sketches of a Provincial Journey*, Peretz shows signs of this very development of his consciousness. (For a discussion of the "thrice born" notion, see Victor Turner's introduction to Barbara Myerhoff's study of a group of Yiddish-speaking elderly, *Number Our Days*, [New York, 1979].)

3. *The History of Yiddish Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hermon Press, 1972), p. 208.

"For twenty-four days the fire-place has been cold."

"For ten days on end we have eaten only potato peels."

"Three have died without a doctor or a prescription. I must save the fourth."⁴

Peretz realized that "the data" would best be revealed through the speech of the people themselves. No one can read *Sketches of a Provincial Journey* and not imagine that he is hearing at first hand the accounts of impoverished Jews in Poland toward the end of the nineteenth century.

At one point, unable to face the dilemma of his relationship to his statistics, Peretz conjures up the kind of other-worldly scene that he was later to perfect in several of his stories. He dreams of two angels. The evil one appears to him holding the promise of material wealth in one hand and potato peels in the other. The good angel, appearing naked and carrying nothing, is about to speak, but instead, a voice crying "Fire" awakens Peretz. Tongues of fire stretch out toward him from nearby, saying, "Don't be frightened, it's insured." The venture into the impoverished *shtetlakh* is having such an impact on his imagination that he finds himself waking from a dream into a fantasy.

In the *Sketches* Peretz shows how fantastic and other-worldly scenes are ways by which he can both verify and transcend the poverty of Jewish life. Through such fantasies he interweaves his despair and his sense of a Jewish condition not defined by the sodden material terms alone. His fantasy confirms and yet invigorates the impoverished Jewish situation, so that at certain moments the sketch book realism, projecting a dour ethnographical comedy, is metamorphosed to a dream-like obsession with Jewish suffering in the Pale.

The impoverished life on which Peretz is gathering statistics so impresses him that at one point he seems to be hallucinating an interview. Toward the end of the *Sketches* the author has returned to his lodgings, nervous and tired. Lying down on a sofa, but before he can close his eyes, he is awakened by a grimy looking madman climbing through the window into his room, demanding that the recorder include him in his calculations. Affected by the unusual and fantastic appearance of *der meshugener* who wants to be included in the figures, Peretz feels himself possessed by the reality that he has come to study. It has taken hold of him, rather than the other way around. (Peretz, the inquiring gatherer of statistics, is a bit like the prosecuting angel in "Bontsha, the Silent" in that, although at first he calls for only the dry facts, he soon realizes the pity surrounding those facts.) This interplay between reality and fantasy in Peretz's work reflects his sense of such a desperate Jewish condition that the realistic descriptions must occasionally be "transcended" in order for the reader to grasp the spirit of the people within that condition, a recognition not attainable

4. *Bilder un skitsn* (New York: Jewish Book Agency, 1929), p. 59. All translations from the Yiddish are my own.

through realism alone. At the same time, the escape into fantasy sometimes allows Peretz to escape a sudden Jewish condition which otherwise, in its sheer literalness, he fears he himself will succumb to.

II

A comparison of Peretz's reactions to *shtetl* Jewry with the reactions of two Jewish writers whose works appeared before and after his visit further points up the nature of his relationship to the material that he initially approached as only statistical information.

After visiting Poland in 1822, Heinrich Heine published "Memoir in Poland," in which he declared: "The external aspect of the Polish Jews is horrible. A shudder runs over me when I think of the first Polish village I saw. . . . But loathing was soon replaced by sympathy when I examined the condition of these people more closely and saw the pigsty holes in which they lived, jabbered, prayed, haggled — and were miserable." Although Heine goes on to deprecate the Polish Jews for their narrow intellectual outlook, superstition, scholastic quibbling, and "barbaric fur hat," he decides, not without a tone of intellectual slumming, that they had a unified identity that was preferable to the character of the amorphous, bourgeois German Jews. Concludes Heine: "With his dirty fur, his well-populated beard, his bouquet of garlic and his jabber, the Polish Jew is still much dearer to me than many another who is a nabob with government bonds."⁵ Heine's supposed affection for Polish Jewry is not so much a value in itself — half undercut, anyway, by his unconcealed disdain for *shtraymlakh* and Yiddish — as it is a means for exposing the shallow and incoherent life of the German Jew.

The later writer who came to the Pale is Isaac Babel, who, in 1920, crossed into Poland along with a Cossack cavalry group and for the first time came into contact with *shtetl* life in western Russia and eastern Poland. Like Heine, Babel was revolted by this way of life, glad that it was ending; at the same time he is also drawn to it. However much he may balk at the passivity, the powerlessness, the wretchedness, the unworldliness of that Jewish life (here he is largely thinking of Hasidism) — there remains an inwardness to that life that attracts him, that exercises itself on him, precisely to the extent that physical heroism, military courage and the Revolution are themselves questioned.

There is a passage at the end of one of his stories ("Discourse on the *Tachanka*") which, in a kind of climax, conveys the startling range of Babel's reactions to Jews as he came across them riding with Cossacks:

Crouching at the feet of nobles' estates were lifeless little Jewish towns. On a brick wall shimmered a prophetic peacock — dispassionate apparition against the blue expanse of space. Hidden away behind scattered huts, a synagogue squatted upon the barren soil — sightless, dented, round as a

5. Hugo Bieber, ed., *Heinrich Heine: A Biographical Anthology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), pp. 116-7.

Hasidic hat. Narrow-chested Jews hung mournfully about the crossways. The image of the stout and jovial Jews of the South, bubbling like cheap wine, took shape in my memory, in sharp contrast to the bitter scorn inherent in these long bony backs, these tragic yellow beards. In these passionate, anguish-chiseled features there was no fat, no warm pulsing of blood. The Jews of Volhynia and Galicia moved jerkily, in an uncontrolled and uncouth way, but their capacity for suffering was full of a somber greatness, and their unvoiced contempt for the Polish gentry unbounded. Watching them, I understood the poignant history of this region: the stories of Talmudists renting taverns, of Rabbis carrying on usury, of young girls raped by Polish troopers and over whom Polish magnates fought pistol duels.⁶

For Babel, the “poignant history” is that of Jews in eastern Poland living under a terrible victimization, struggling to maintain themselves in life and yet not retreating into a spirituality that would transcend and thus deny their terrible, God-wrenched condition. At the same time, Babel allows great pathos to that spirituality. The opposition within Babel between “the Cossack ethos” and “the *shtetl* ethos” contributed to his art in the *Red Cavalry* stories.

Thus we have the case of three Jewish writers visiting the life of Jews in the Pale (or the former Pale) and all three being repelled and touched by that life and forced to investigate their own spiritual loyalties.

Heine came away from the Pale with a means of re-affirming his dislike of the meretriciousness of German-Jewish bourgeois life — the Pale is there to support a previous view. Babel is impressed and disturbed by the passivity and spirituality of Jewish *shtetl* life. His revelation of the powerful drama of Jewish life in the Pale is different from Peretz’s urge to tap the mind and speech of its inhabitants as they reveal themselves. The difference between Babel’s portrayal and Peretz’s is the difference between the shock of recognition and the comprehension that slowly develops. Babel plunges or careens into this world; Peretz moves in closer. Unlike Heine’s honed sarcasm and superiority and Babel’s dynamic clash of cultures (Cossack and *shtetl*), Peretz’s imagination is brought into a subtle rapport with the minds of those who inhabit the *shtetlakh*.

In the ninth chapter Peretz takes a boy out walking with him and reflects on the sky:

The sky hangs over Tishevitz like a dark blue uniform with dull silver buttons. To my companion it seemed like the curtain over the ark with silver spangles. Perhaps he dreamed of a blue silk tefillin sack with spangles. In half a dozen years or so perhaps he will receive such a gift from his bride.⁷

The author is able to give play simultaneously to his dour sense of the world that he is investigating (for a moment its very nature seems stifled by official dress) yet in the next breath he comfortably shifts to the

6. Walter Morrison, ed. and trans., *The Collected Stories of Isaac Babel* (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 85-6.

7. *Bilder un skitsn*, p. 36.

persistent religious sense of most of its inhabitants. Peretz is able to convey the condition of the inhabitants of the *shtetlakh* through their own language, through the imagery they themselves might invoke. The way that the passage slides from Peretz's image of restriction to the religious imagery that he half-assigns to, and half appropriates from, the boy's imagination also crystallizes Peretz's own need to fantasize a release from the sullen life in Tishevitz. Religious imagery, though not religious belief, afforded Peretz that release. To traditional Jewish belief Peretz is what Hawthorne was to Puritanism — not a believer, but one who found its terms lodged within him and useful to his art.

Unlike Heine or Babel, Peretz is able to capture the conversation of the Jews whom he visits. He captures their Yiddish on the wing. We come into the middle of an inquiry about the family of the respondent:

"A wife?"

"Et!"

"What do you mean, 'et'?"

"He wants to divorce her," answers someone else for him.

"How many children?"

He has to consider and start counting on his fingers:

"From the first wife, mine — one, two, three; hers — one, two; from the second wife. . . ."

He becomes bored of counting.

"Nu, let it be six."

"'Let it be' isn't good enough. I need to know exactly."

"Look here, 'exactly' isn't that simple. Exactly! What do you have to know exactly for? What are you, some kind of official? One has to count for you? Someone is going to come after you and check up on your figures? Ex — act — ly!"⁸

The conversation goes on like this for four pages, Peretz showing how the evasions and grumbling and long-winded reckoning are all ways of responding to, yet keeping off, the prying outsider. Indirectly and finally, Peretz as investigator finds out the man's various strategies for earning a living. But what is more important is that Peretz makes us feel that in the evasive Yiddish of the respondent, along with his charges, interjections, and reciprocal questioning, there is a respectable and ingenious self-defense going on. The rhythm of the Yiddish hides and reveals the poverty of the speaker. On Peretz himself this rhetorical decoy and revelation was not to be lost. The passage illustrates Jacob Glatstein's description of Peretz "as one seeking to gain the refined folk ear."⁹ One can imagine Peretz *der shrayber* admiring what Peretz *der statistiker* must formally object to, but whose objections force the continuation of the conversation that the other half secretly relishes. Peretz came to the *shtetl* to ask questions requiring only factual responses, but what struck him was the total condition and the strategies of response. Here was "the folk

8. *Bilder un skitsn*, p. 45.

9. "Peretz and the Jewish Nineteenth Century," in I. Howe and E. Greenberg, eds., *Voices from the Yiddish* (Ann Arbor, 1972), p. 53.

imagination" at work in answer to his very questions as a social scientist. He had triggered more than what the questions had imagined.

Thus, it is an immersion in the lives of these Jews of the Pale that we witness in Peretz's travel sketches. His respect for, and frustration with, their responses make up his total response. Scornful as can be Mendeleyev, the first great Yiddish novelist (c. 1836–1917), in his descriptions of the impoverished conditions of the Jews of the Pale, Peretz can also indulge in the famous legend of the Jews emigrating from Germany eastward, deciding to rest at a certain place — *po-lin*, "here abide," thus giving the country, Poland, its name. The intellectual and sophisticated mind attracted to folk material for literary purposes is one of the great images of Peretz that emerges from *Sketches of a Provincial Journey*.

The sketches end abruptly, with the story of a man who can't be helped because his insides are burnt out from too much drink. Not even the local *lamed-vovnik*, though he has the reputation of saving lives, could rescue this one from death. Perhaps Peretz is suggesting, in this last sketch, that no miracle work will save the worn-out condition of *shtetl* life. Neither will the gathering of statistics. Indeed, he comes to perceive that his very reporting of the extra-legal activities of the Jews (necessary for survival within the crevices of society) will threaten their livelihood.

In his trip to the interior of Jewish life Peretz had discovered the limits of reform at that historical moment. He registered the dismal, narrow life of *shtetl* Jewry yet was touched by the folk: their legends, their speech, their gossip, their fears, their need to tell stories, (much as James Agee was affected by the poor southern whites whom he visited and then wrote about in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*).

We discover in Peretz's *Sketches of a Provincial Journey* a work opposite from the *bildungsroman*, the story of the provincial young man who comes to the city and unexpectedly receives an education. Peretz's sketch book is about the intellectual, no longer young but still in his prime, who travels from the city to the provinces and discovers the connection between frustration and story-telling. The decay of Jewish life in the *shtetlakh* of Poland, along with the people's strategies in talking about their condition, left their impression on Peretz, for whom legend and fantasy were among the ways of exploring the Jewish condition. The historical moment told Peretz's imagination that what was intended to be social science and material for economic reform could only become literature. Peretz's sense of what his materials might be for the Yiddish literature that he would come to write and his attitude toward those materials were influenced by his frustrating, yet enriched, role as questioner and investigator of Jewish life. He found his material and its transmitters working on at a level than he had not anticipated. Going to the folk turned out to be more complicated and intriguing than he originally imagined. It was all a part of his own movement toward Yiddish.

The “Bourgeois Humanism” of American Jews

STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD

THE UNITED STATES HAS NEVER BEEN IMMUNE to the bacillus of anti-Semitism that is so inescapable a part of the history of Europe, and artifacts of American bigotry can readily be conjured up, available as evidence of the betrayal of the egalitarian dream. Such an indictment might be highlighted by a presentation of a copy of General Grant's Order Number 11, intending to make the Department of Tennessee *Judenrein* in twenty-four hours; the guest register at Saratoga's Grand Union Hotel, which Joseph Seligman and other "Israelites" were not permitted to sign; assorted "Gentiles Only" signs and advertisements; a restricted real estate covenant; a sample issue of the Dearborn *Independent*; the noose from which dangled the mutilated body of Leo Frank; some sheets replete with the insignia of the Ku Klux Klan. The exhibits and the examples could be multiplied.

But though we cannot, in Lincoln's phrase, escape history, we can misread it, and can, by narrowness of perspective, distort its meaning. We can acknowledge the pathology of prejudice in which American institutions have been implicated, but we are not thereby obliged to exaggerate that legacy. Lincoln himself rescinded Grant's order three weeks later; and, after a longer interval, Henry Ford professed to be shocked and ashamed to discover anti-Semitism in the editorials appearing in his name. Jews built their own resorts in the Adirondacks and elsewhere, and formed their own defense organizations that have helped drive open discrimination underground and often into oblivion. In 1948, the Supreme Court ruled that restrictive covenants could not be enforced.¹ The lynching of Leo Frank is notorious because it is horrifying and because it is virtually unique; it typified no pogroms. And when Thomas Dixon's novel, *The Clansman*, was transformed into *The Birth of a Nation*, the most celebrated of all silent motion pictures, he explained that the film's title referred to the Aryan nation. Yet, rather than despising Jews, Dixon admired them as "the greatest race of people God has ever created." And when, during the Depression, the novelist was forced to sell the North Carolina estate that had been purchased with his share of the film's profits, the new Jewish owner converted the land into a retreat for the

1. *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

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B'nai B'rith Youth Organization and for human relations conclaves.² Although God had promised Abraham that his "seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen. 22:17), the bill of sale of even a racist like Dixon cannot be cited as proof.

A dozen years ago the standard reference work, the *American Jewish Yearbook*, dropped its separate entry on anti-Semitism — thus perhaps confirming George Washington's electrifying promise to Jewish congregations almost two centuries earlier. The new government, the President had vowed, would give "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance"³, and nowhere else in the Diaspora has that promise come so tantalizingly close to fulfillment. Nowhere else has the public culture been so receptive to Jewish interests and rights, to both the hunger for acceptance and the impulse to remain different. For example, political parties specifically advocating the oppression or expulsion of Jews are absent from the annals of American elections, though movements with such programs erupted in the German and Austrian empires in the late nineteenth century. In central Europe, a political party with "Christian" in its name was announcing that it was against the Jews. Thus, when the last Regent of Hungary was introduced to a visiting secretary of the YMCA, he expressed pleasure at meeting the American representative of what Admiral Horthy called "such an important anti-Semitic organization."⁴ Something of the contrasting actuality of American life is suggested by an incident reported by one of my colleagues. His young son once noticed the neon-lit sign atop the YMCA building in Boston and proclaimed that the initials stood for the word *yarmulke*.

Already half a century ago, the sociologist Robert Park recommended that the study of American Jewish history and culture be required in the general curriculum of all high schools, since such an inquiry promised fuller understanding of representative American lives.⁵ Jews became acculturated so rapidly, absorbing national values as though by osmosis, that, in the twentieth century, in particular, the ancient danger of persecution has been displaced by the different problem of identity. Their fears of the Gentiles have largely given way to anxieties about assimilation. Having found a liberal atmosphere and a competitive economy congenial, American Jews have strikingly risen from poverty and obscurity. No immigrant group distanced itself more quickly from the proletarian world of its fathers and mothers, and almost no other reli-

2. Dixon quoted in Raymond A. Cook, *Thomas Dixon* (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 63; Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 189.

3. Washington quoted in Morris U. Schappes, ed., *A Documentary History of Jews in the United States* (New York: Schocken, 1971), p. 80.

4. Nicolas Horthy quoted in Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Bantam, 1976), p. 44n.

5. Robert E. Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950), pp. 354-355; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Revolution and Counter-revolution: Change and Persistence in Social Structures* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1970), p. 148.

gious group has coagulated so completely in the middle class. In 1890, New York's "Jewtown" had been a choice example of how "the other half" lived; by 1963, its surviving remnant was only glancingly included in the destitute one-fourth to one-fifth comprising "the other America."⁶ For, already, during the Great Depression, when one-third of the population was still "ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished," some Jews were prominently trying to break the cycle of poverty through the drafting and implementation of laws and government programs. Tocqueville's description of the bar as the American equivalent of an aristocracy is relevant here; currently, one out of every five lawyers is Jewish.⁷ Tocqueville's perception into the predominantly "commercial passions" of the Americans further suggests how representative the Jews are, for, in locating their primary occupations — and often preoccupations — since their arrival here, we really mean business. At least on the surface, then, Jews may be, as Robert Park suggested, like other Americans, only more so.

The pattern of advance — from *shtetl* to steerage to slum to suburb — became so common, and their faith in reward for hard work and individual achievement so tenacious, that their traditional sense of transiency and homelessness has largely subsided. In a recent interview, an Orthodox woman in Boston recalled that her brother and all his friends, when growing up, obeyed the Halakhic requirement to keep the head covered by at all times wearing baseball caps.⁸ Earlier in the century, hyphenate Americans often sought to efface that hyphen and, at least until recently, were more anxious to demonstrate how snugly they fit into this society than how they might improve it or enrich it.

But, despite appearances of homogenization, ancestral allegiances have not become extinct, and ethnic differences have not been bleached out. Fifteen years ago, an article in *Look* magazine entitled "The Vanishing American Jew" reverberated in some apprehensive precincts,⁹ for the vital signs of group survival seemed to be flickering and the eclipse of endogamy seemed to signal end-game for Jewry. Since then, intermarriage rates have continued to soar (while, in addition, the birth rate has skidded). Nevertheless, the Jew has not yet vanished (although *Look* itself has), and neither ethnicity nor religion can be considered moribund in American life generally. The official pretense of complete Americanization could, in the past, be maintained for regular three-year intervals, until each election year, when the realities of traditional loyalties were enforced on attentive political candidates. That pretense has itself faded with the realization of how slowly assimilation has occurred. And even if the direction is clear, the velocity of change has been overestimated. For

6. Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), pp. 76–99; Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), p. 140.

7. Martin Mayer, *The Lawyers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 16; Stephen D. Isaacs, *Jews and American Politics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), p. 23.

8. "Doing and Believing: A Round-Table Discussion," *Moment*, (September 1978): 41.

9. Thomas B. Morgan, "The Vanishing American Jew," *Look*, 28 (May 5, 1964): 42–43.

Jews, along with other minorities since the mid-60s, have experienced a process that began in self-defense and then invited self-discovery. The mandatory 3-I tours of American politicians — to Ireland, Italy and Israel — are almost as much a staple of campaigning as are the prayers of three clergymen — Protestant, Catholic and Jewish — which are required to sanctify civic ceremonies.

Though they are courted and counted as much as larger ethnic groups, even their own Bible notes how small a people the ancient Hebrews were, and, in the world today, the total number of Jews is equal to the statistical error in the latest Chinese census.¹⁰ Less than 3% of the American population, they cannot seek safety in numbers. Nor do they have the clout that can be derived from the efficiency of central organization. Within the various American Jewish communities, no way has yet been found to impose political or ideological conformity or to ensure the implementation of the policies of its spokesmen. No wisps of white smoke ever signal who its leaders are. Unlike Jews in other countries, they have no chief rabbi, although Irving Howe's book recounts the remedy offered by an immigrant from Moscow who arrived in New York in 1893. Hayim Vidrowitz had a sign placed on his door, giving his name and designating as his title, "Chief Rabbi of America." When asked by whose authority Vidrowitz had assumed that responsibility, the rabbi replied, perhaps rather sheepishly: "The sign painter's."¹¹

Decentralization of authority and the proliferation of parallel organizations also mean that, contrary to some right-wing fantasies, it is quite impossible to devise a conspiracy among members of this highly talkative group (some of whom don't speak to one another). No Jewish politician has ever been identified as supremely qualified to articulate its interests. In fact, Jews have long been somewhat underrepresented among elected officials, perhaps for fear of arousing dormant prejudice. Abe Lincoln could get away with being ambitious, but Abe Ribicoff might always be accused of being "pushy." Beginning with ante-bellum Senators Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana and David Levy Yulee of Florida, many Jews have represented states or districts in which the number of their co-religionists has been too negligible to raise specters of "bloc voting." In 1939, when President Roosevelt nominated Felix Frankfurter to the Supreme Court, several influential Jews, including the publisher of the *New York Times*, attempted to scuttle the appointment on the ground that it would heighten anti-Semitism.¹² Old Diaspora habits die hard, even in America.

Yet, despite handicaps of demography, community organization and anxieties entangled in ancient memories, the Jews have exerted a certain

10. Milton Himmelfarb, *The Jews of Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 359.

11. Irving Howe, with Kenneth Libo, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), p. 195.

12. Joseph P. Lash "A Brahmin of the Law," in Lash, ed., *From the Diaries of Felix Frankfurter* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), p. 64.

influence on American life and, especially, since the New Deal, on politics.

Why is this so? The recognition that candidates and officials have accorded to them is due, in part, to the calibrations of the Federal system, for "who gets what" is dependent on where they live. In one survey a couple of decades ago, Jews expressed a preference to live in neighborhoods that are about 50% Jewish, and while it can be assumed that this percentage is not an ideal for most Gentiles, Jews have exhibited what *Fortune* magazine once called a "notorious" tendency to "agglomerate."¹³ Almost a decade ago, Harvard College was considering a change in its policies, and a dean of admissions suggested that, in order to achieve greater diversity in the student body, recruitment should get outside "the doughnuts around the big cities." To which a Jewish faculty member promptly replied, "Those aren't doughnuts; those are bagels."¹⁴ Not by design, the Electoral College gives a certain form of minority preference, and those whose homes comprise the doughnuts and bagels of the great cities in the most populous states have a magnified influence in the winner-take-all system of Presidential elections. The equality promised in the Declaration of Independence is, in fact, modulated by zip codes. While the Jewish presence in the biggest American city has long been conspicuous, it is less known that the second largest concentration of Jews in the world is not in Tel Aviv but in Los Angeles. Jews also vote more than other groups, casting 4% of the ballots. That extra 1% beyond their proportion of the general population may seem miniscule, but it means three-fourths of a million votes,¹⁵ in a system so delicately balanced that 55% of the vote in a Presidential election is considered a landslide.

Nor should the historical contributions of Jewish intellectuals be minimized, since they have helped to locate the proper place of minorities in a democracy and to formulate the rules under which natives and newcomers alike have played. In societies emphasizing ascription as much as achievement, it was possible through conversion (Disraeli), wealth (Bleichröder), assimilation (Dreyfus before the Affair), talent and luck (all of the above) to *beat* the system. But in reflecting upon the implications of democracy, in therefore stigmatizing the entrenchment of privilege, some Jews were able to *change* the system.

Here is a predilection as recognizable and special as a signature. Perhaps the first theorist of the secular and democratic state founded on the ideal of civil liberty was Spinoza, whose arguments were formulated not long after other Sefardic Jews were first landing in New Amsterdam. The poet who hailed America as the "mother of exiles," and whose sonnet welcoming the oppressed is at the base of the Statue of Liberty, was Emma Lazarus. The playwright of *The Melting Pot*, which envisaged the transfig-

13. Nathan Glazer, *Affirmative Discrimination: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 157; "Jews in America," *Fortune*, 13 (February 1936): 130.

14. Nora Sayre, *Sixties Going on Seventies* (New York: Arbor House, 1973), p. 147.

15. Isaacs, *Jews and American Politics*, pp. 6-7.

uration of European hatreds into new loyalties, was Israel Zangwill. The anthropologist who inaugurated the liberal environmentalist interpretation of race, observing adaptation and plasticity in the attributes of former Europeans and their descendants, was Franz Boas. The historian who wished to record the particular tale of these immigrants, and then realized that "the immigrants *were* American history," is Oscar Handlin.¹⁶ The literary critic who interpreted the central tradition of American fiction as the transcendence of bigotry through an interracial buddy system is Leslie Fiedler. The theologian whose grasp of the implications of religious pluralism was perhaps most resonant was Will Herberg. The philosopher who coined the phrase "cultural pluralism," out of the conviction that the diverse heritages of the new Americans should neither be fudged nor forgotten, was a rabbi's son, Horace Kallen. Among the first Constitutional lawyers, specializing in arguments before the Supreme Court in defense of the rights of minorities and the underprivileged, was Louis Marshall, the spiritual ancestor of Jack Greenberg of the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund and of Ruth Bader Ginsburg of the women's movement. Marshall was also the most persistent advocate at Versailles of the insertion of legal clauses in the constitutions of the newly-created states after World War I, designed to protect national minorities. The refugee lawyer who invented the word "genocide" to describe the ineffable fate of the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe was Raphael Lemkin, who deserves to be more widely known also for his efforts to brand the destruction of any people or race as a crime in international law. The native-born attorney who helped formulate the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights was Joseph Proskauer. Perhaps the first author to use "ethnicity" in our contemporary sense is Erik Homburger Erikson,¹⁷ although the Oxford English Dictionary gives credit to the sociologist David Riesman, a former law clerk to Justice Brandeis, who himself affirmed the compatibility of the ethos of individualism with the persistence of ethnic loyalty. "The new nationalism adopted by America," Brandeis announced in a Fourth of July speech in 1915, "proclaims that each race or people, like each individual, has the right and duty to develop, and only through such differentiated development will high civilization be attained."¹⁸

The less precarious status and political security of Jews in the United States may be due, in part, to their having thought about the ramifications of democratic pluralism for a long time. No wonder, then, that the black novelist, Ralph Ellison, has regarded his native land as

freer politically and richer culturally because there are Jewish Americans to bring it the benefit of their special forms of dissent . . . and their gift for

16. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1951), p. 3.

17. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950), p. 101.

18. Brandeis quoted in Alpheus Thomas Mason, *Brandeis: A Free Man's Life* (New York: Viking, 1946), p. 439.

ideas which are based upon the uniqueness of their experience.¹⁹

This commitment to the perpetuation and accommodation of differences — in *e pluribus unum* — is itself an expression of Jewish distinctiveness. Beneath at least some of those baseball caps, special attitudes are crystallizing before going into general circulation. Many Jews have manifested an orientation toward civil society which does not mirror the patterns of others. These differences may be marginal, but are, nevertheless, discernible — just as the American atmosphere has altered the idiom of Jewishness, tempering the authenticity of the connection to tradition. Their lives may be kosher-style rather than kosher. But however uncertainly and ambivalently, they are custodians of a tradition that stretches sinuously back into the deepest and most mysterious past. Their history is not yet identical with everyone else's. Several years ago the Nobel Prize-winning Israeli author, S.Y. Agnon, asked Saul Bellow whether his novels had been translated into Hebrew. When the American replied in the affirmative, the Israeli writer is reported to have exclaimed, "Good. Then you are safe."²⁰ Since over one hundred times as many people in the world can speak English rather than Hebrew, Agnon's assurance of the continuity of the Jewish people may be awesome in its audacity. But the *kaddish*, the prayer for the dead, extols God without even mentioning death; and the festival of Hanukkah is designed to commemorate the miracle of a cruse of oil that burned for eight days instead of one. This communal capacity to survive has long defied historical plausibility, and this will to prevail against all odds continues to animate many Jews.

But Agnon's remark also suggests that the Jews can bring the dimension of time to a nation oriented instead to the triumph over space, a nation whose span of generations could easily be tucked into a few of those Biblical begats. The American political heritage is so brief that one of its most lustrous figures, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., could know both John Quincy Adams and Alger Hiss; and the ahistorical secularism of Jefferson's characteristic remark, "The earth belongs always to the living generation,"²¹ could be contrasted with the expansive awe of Psalms 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's . . . the world, and they that dwell therein." Jefferson spoke *for* America, which is why those also conscious of dead generations sometimes have had to speak *to* America.

The diachronic sense does not, in itself, humanize; one common school teacher in Linz, Austria, Dr. Leopold Poetsch, was responsible for teaching history to both Adolf Hitler and Adolf Eichmann.²³ But a sense

19. Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Signet, 1966), pp. 132–133.

20. Cynthia Ozick, "Hadrian and Hebrew," *Moment*, 1 (September 1975): 77.

21. Henry L. Feingold, "The Jewish Contribution to American Politics," *JUDAISM*, 25 (Summer 1976): 315.

22. Jefferson to James Madison, September 6, 1789, in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *The Portable Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 449.

23. Gideon Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 27.

of the past, if enlarged with empathy, can offer a deeper perception of human possibility and dignity and, even in American politics the Jews belong to the party not only of memory but of hope. What the critic Elizabeth Hardwick discerned in their fiction — “a spirit of international rationalism . . . a broader, old libertarian, humane . . . tradition”²⁴ — is also applicable to their political life. Harkening back to the rock of ages, they also feel at home in the age of reform. The Jews have characteristically wished to make idealism operational, to extend the conventional boundaries and amend the codes of popular sovereignty. Other minorities have engaged in politics primarily to defend traditional lifestyles or to advance economic demands, and they have generally been satisfied, not when elected officials have seen the light but when they have felt the heat. That is the law of thermodynamics under which representative government in America has ordinarily worked, and the Jews have not been entirely unfamiliar with its effects. But they have also been devoted to principles whose connection to economic self-interest may be considered paradoxical for their votes do not correspond to their bank accounts, or to their business and home addresses.

Instead, Jews have often pumped visions of social justice into a polity which has long been condemned or celebrated for its evasion of ideology. American candidates ordinarily know that a platform is designed to stand on, not to run on, and the quintessential electoral slogan, “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!” might be contrasted with “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” or even Lenin’s “Peace, Land, Bread.” American politicians have long preferred to let sleeping dogmas lie as deals are struck; ideals are left to others. In the nineteenth century and well into our own, only well-bred Protestants showed any inclination to apply ethical abstractions to the processes of government. As genteel civic reformers, they enunciated principles of fair play while they battled corruption in morality plays that often closed after one act. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the Jews have become perhaps the most conspicuous players for political stakes that are apparently more high-minded than self-interest.

The Jews might have been expected to show greater appreciation for the postfeudal system that has encouraged the commercial passions and stimulated the accumulation of private wealth. They have shown their gratitude by welcoming the welfare state. Shortly after the Second World War, adherents of seventeen religious groups were asked whether they favored “guaranteed economic security.” Agreement with this position meant repudiation of *laissez-faire* capitalism. By a slight margin the Catholics, who had the highest percentage of believers below the middle class, were first. The Jews, with the smallest proportion of their members engaged in manual labor, were second.²⁵ A decade later another ques-

24. Hardwick quoted in A. Alvarez, *Under Pressure: The Writer in Society* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965), p. 176.

25. Isaacs, *Jews and American Politics*, p. 149.

tionnaire revealed that “middle-class Jews were more likely to express the view that the government is doing too little [to regulate the economy] than were working-class members of either the white Protestant or Catholic groups.”²⁶ Those who have had to meet payrolls have, therefore, shown the least resentment against welfare rolls. In the early 1970s, in their support for welfare for the poor and for national medical programs, Jews were even more progressive than they were two decades earlier, and still quite divergent from other whites.²⁷ Not entirely persuaded by American traditions of self-reliance, many Jews realize that no one wears bootstraps any more. Pecuniary motives do not explain this willingness to revise classical capitalism with policies nourished by heavier taxation of the more comfortable classes. Such attitudes may, however, show the influence of the ideals of social justice,²⁸ as though, despite the advantages of bourgeois life, many Jews remain experts in estrangement, unable to ignore the Passover reminder of having been slaves in Egypt.

More agreeable than other groups to governmental policies that are intended to improve the wellbeing of the dispossessed, the Jews also exhibit distinctive spending patterns of their own. For all their dedication to what is still called — perhaps quaintly — the Protestant ethic, they seem unwilling to lay up treasure upon earth and, according to one sociologist, “spend more on the ‘good life’ for themselves and their families than do Protestants at the same income level.”²⁹ Accountants know whether a country club is Jewish or Gentile by checking the food bills against the liquor bills,³⁰ and in many cities Jews are also ravenous in their consumption and subsidization of cultural activities. President Nixon himself grasped this phenomenon when, in taped remarks to an aide, he described the arts as follows: “You know — they’re Jews, they’re left-wing — in other words, stay away.”³¹ It is more tempting, and more methodologically sound, to follow the advice given by the Watergate informant, Deep Throat: “Follow the money.” For one need no longer take too literally the etymology of “philanthropy” to acknowledge the extraordinary willingness of Jews to part with their wealth in private charity, especially for causes in their own particular community and for Israel. In 1972, for example, over half a billion dollars was raised through the United Jewish Appeal, local federations and Israel Bonds, while the Red Cross was raising \$132 million from all Americans, including Jews.³² This generos-

26. Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religion's Impact on Politics, Economics and Family Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1963), pp. 152–153, 157.

27. Alan Fisher, “Continuity and Erosion of Jewish Liberalism,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 66 (December 1976): 334, 348.

28. Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The Political Behavior of American Jews* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956), pp. 176, 180–182, and “Introduction,” *American Jewish Quarterly*, 66 (December 1976): 182, 186.

29. Lipset, *Revolution and Counter-revolution*, p. 153.

30. Himmelfarb, *Jews of Modernity*, p. 69.

31. Staff of the Washington Post, *The Fall of a President* (New York: Delacorte, 1974), p. 222.

32. Isaacs, *Jews and American Politics*, p. 119.

ity also embraces politics. In a conversation once with Ben Bradlee, President Kennedy bitterly remarked that his wife's stepfather had given only \$500 in the 1960 campaign and added, hyperbolically, that "the only people who really gave during political campaigns now were Jews." His assistant, who served as liaison with Jewish contributors, could not recall that any of them asked for something in exchange for picking up the tab, and a former aide to Senator Muskie has called them "the most altruistic givers in the country."³³

The most favored causes and candidates have been overwhelmingly liberal. The Jews may be, as Disraeli suspected, naturally conservative;³⁴ if so, in twentieth century America at least, they have been remarkably slow to discover their own interests. They have tended to support the government when it attacks social and economic privilege, and have found incomprehensible Lord Melbourne's definition of the entire purpose of government: the prevention of crime and the preservation of contracts. Yet the Jews have generally not allowed statism to calcify into a dogma, and have not participated in the campaigns of conservative moralists to proscribe certain forms of personal conduct. Such activists, often from other religious groups, who oppose freer access to abortion, birth control, divorce, pornography, gambling and alcoholic beverages, have rarely found enthusiastic allies among the Jews, whose own ethical tradition promotes acceptance of the natural world and repudiates asceticism.³⁵ Poverty and life-long chastity were never Jewish ideals, and, though temperance was expected, the pleasures of this world were not stigmatized. Conservative moralism is, therefore, alien to most Jews who, in this respect, would deny a major role to government.

Liberalism was also manifested in hostility to McCarthyism, even though the repertoire of its eponymous leader never included overt anti-Semitism,³⁶ and no group has shown itself more committed to the principles articulated in the Bill of Rights. Here, again, the relation to ethnic interest is not obvious. The First Amendment could be read more selectively than many Jews have done, since it protects not only all worshippers but, also, political extremists like Klansmen, Bundists, fascists, white supremacists and Nazis. The recent hemorrhage of Jewish members from the American Civil Liberties Union, after it agreed to defend the right of Nazis to march in Skokie, suggests that freedom of assembly

33. Benjamin C. Bradlee, *Conversations with Kennedy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1976), p. 193; Will Maslow, "Jewish Political Power: An Assessment," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 66 (December 1976): 353.

34. Benjamin Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography* (London: Longmans, Green, 1881), pp. 356-357, 358.

35. Fuchs, *Political Behavior of American Jews*, pp. 182-184, 190-191; Fisher, "Continuity and Erosion of Jewish Liberalism," p. 335.

36. Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Rabb, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 229, 231, 244; Lucy S. Dawidowicz and Leon J. Goldstein, *Politics in a Pluralist Democracy: Studies of Voting in the 1960 Election* (New York: Institute of Human Relations Press, 1963), pp. 88-89.

can be construed — and opposed — in blatantly ethnic terms. Prior to the Skokie controversy, Jews comprised an estimated 40% of the ACLU's membership;³⁷ even afterwards it remains much higher than the fraction of Jews in the general population would warrant.

This disproportionate dedication to the strategic freedoms may not always correspond to the particular rights of Jews, but it is quite consistent with a general adherence to liberalism unmatched by other groups. Examining the political attitudes of residents of Detroit, Gerhard Lenski discovered that black Protestants were liberal on questions of the welfare state and civil rights, but not with regard to international affairs and civil liberties. White Protestants were hostile to racial integration and to government intervention in the economy. Catholics also opposed civil rights, and were moderate — but not liberal — on questions of freedom of speech, foreign aid and governmental regulation of the economy. Only the Jews were classifiable as liberal in all categories, especially when civil rights were at issue.³⁸ In a society that is considerably less than perfect and east of Eden, such consistent views are not, in my opinion, disgraceful — merely, compared to Gentiles', eccentric.

Their political impulses have often been tinged with utopianism, and the radical disposition of Jews has been noticed — and feared — far more than their natural conservatism. Centuries of persecution in Europe denied them much expectation of a stake in society; and the French Revolutionary extension of entitlements marked a caesura in Jewish history, a disintegration of ghetto walls, an end to political isolation. But genuine equality, which is asymptotic anyway, was still cruelly denied, and deprivation and exploitation in America helped inspire working class radicalism, especially in the first third of the twentieth century.³⁹ Among the once-flourishing American socialist newspapers, the daily with the highest circulation was in Yiddish, the *Forward*. The views that it expressed represented a combustible product of centuries of victimization and discrimination, combined with messianic expectations and imperatives. Those values — often in distorted form — showed up virtually everywhere that Western Jews could be located: in the Pale and in Palestine, in North America and in Cuba. It may be more than a curiosity that Mark Zborowsky, the co-author of a standard book on *shtetl* culture, *Life Is With People*, was Trotsky's secretary in exile — while spying for the N.K.V.D.⁴⁰ In America after the Second World War, revolutionaries have been more often spawned in libraries than in slums (one precedent is

37. Anthony Lukas, "The A.C.L.U. Against Itself," *New York Times Magazine*, July 9, 1978: 10.

38. Lenski, *The Religious Factor*, pp. 152-169, 209-210.

39. Werner Cohn, "The Politics of American Jews," in Marshall Sklare, ed., *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group* (New York: Free Press, 1958), pp. 615-619, 621, 624-625.

40. Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (New York: MacMillan, 1968), p. 445; Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 577, 1101.

Marx himself); and it is revealing that one contributor to a 1961 *Commentary* symposium took for granted the fact that most of the campus dissidents he had known were Jews.⁴¹ While many such radicals have been born into Jewish families, only a minority of Jews have been radicals — and many of them did not remain so. The belief that America was different from the continent was sharply expressed by the immigrant Jew who dominated the labor movement for a third of a century. A trade unionist here, Samuel Gompers, claimed that he “would be a Socialist in Germany and in Russia a nihilist.”⁴²

A touching but little-known description of the process of moderation can be found in a 1903 essay by Voltairine de Cleyre who, after a convent education and a conversion to anarchism, decided to tutor the immigrant poor in Philadelphia. In the dozen years that she “lived and worked with foreign Jews,” she wrote,

I have taught over a thousand, and found them, as a rule, the brightest, the most persistent and sacrificing students, and in youth dreamers of social ideals. . . . I myself have seen such genuine heroism in the cause of education practiced by girls and boys, and even by men and women with families, as would pass the limits of belief to the ordinary mind.

Yet despite “cold, starvation, self-isolation . . . [and] exhaustion of body even to emaciation,” most of de Cleyre’s students somehow managed “to visit the various clubs and societies where radical thought is discussed, and sooner or later ally themselves either with the Socialist Section, the Liberal Leagues, the Single Tax Clubs, or the Anarchist Groups.” Yet the teacher could not hide her discouragement, for the newcomers’ attitudes toward society were not directed to transforming it so much as toward making it.

As the years pass and the gradual filtration and absorption of American commercial life goes on, (she observed), my students become successful professionals . . . and the old teacher must turn for comradeship to the new youth. . . .⁴³

This eulogy for immigrant radicalism did not also mean the death of cosmopolitan and humanitarian ideals. That was a funeral which succeeding generations of Jews somehow missed, as their responses to questionnaires and to candidates demonstrated. A larger fraction of Jews than in any other religious group consider themselves to be independents rather than partisan loyalists.⁴⁴ But beginning with their massive support for Al Smith in 1928, they have notoriously agglomerated in the liberal wing of

41. Ned Polsky in “Jewishness and the Younger Intellectuals,” *Commentary*, 31 (April 1961): 345; Louis Ruchames, “Jewish Radicalism in the United States,” in Peter Rose, ed., *The Ghetto and Beyond* (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 232–251.

42. Gompers quoted in Norton Keller, *Affairs of State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 397.

43. de Cleyre quoted in Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 77, 78.

44. Lenski, *The Religious Factor*, p. 139; Dawidowicz and Goldstein, *Politics in a Pluralist Democracy*, p. 76.

the Democratic party. Their fervor for the New Deal was so intense that a Republican judge quipped: "The Jews have three *velten* [worlds]: *di velt* [this world], *yene velt* [the next], and Roosevelt."⁴⁵ Diverse interest groups and minorities joined the coalition that was forged in the 1930s but none exceeded the Jews in adhesiveness to the reforms promised in that rendezvous with destiny. In 1960, the proportion of Jews voting for Kennedy was greater than the proportion of Catholics and equal to the percentage of blacks. In 1964, relatively more Jews voted against Goldwater, the most explicitly conservative candidate in memory, than did any other group of whites, regardless of income. In 1968, the percentage of the Jewish vote for Humphrey was closest to that of the poor racial minorities, like the Puerto Ricans and the Chicanos. In the polling booth, Jews found the candidacy of George Wallace, the heresiarch of the most conservative bloc in the Roosevelt coalition, as repugnant as blacks did.⁴⁶

Here, because of the contrast in candidates, the 1972 election is especially illustrative. The incumbent organized perhaps the least subtle appeal to white ethnic groups in recent times, against an opponent who was perceived, among other things, as a bit "soft" on Israel. Yet, despite much speculation that conservatism was gaining adherents among Jews (which was partly true), despite predictions that their heritage of liberalism was about to be jettisoned, and despite Senator McGovern's opera-bouffe blunder in New York's Garment District when he ordered milk with his chopped chicken liver, he got a higher percentage of Jewish votes than, say, Adlai Stevenson did in 1956. President Nixon attracted the support of three-fourths of all residents of high socio-economic areas and won a majority of all groups of white ethnics — except for the Jews, who cast two out of every three of their votes for the liberal, Democratic candidate.⁴⁷ In fact, if the rest of the country had voted the way the Jews did, George McGovern would have been elected President with the most impressive landslide in history. Four years later Jimmy Carter, the more liberal candidate, got 72% of the Jewish vote, a far greater mandate than he got from his fellow Southern whites. This record of unwavering liberalism and plebeian voting patterns may be familiar; that should not detract from its importance.

In recognizing the continuity of this voting pattern, and in specifying the ingredients of middle-class achievement, of some sympathy for the downtrodden, of fidelity to civil rights and civil liberties and philanthropy, I am reminded of Lev Kopelev's memoir of Soviet Russia, *To Be Preserved Forever*. As the Red Army advanced into Germany in 1945, its soldiers perpetrated many crimes of rape and murder, looting and pillage. Though he was a Jew well aware of the Nazi policy of genocide as well

45. Jonah J. Goldstein, quoted in Dawidowicz and Goldstein, p. 87.

46. Himmelfarb, *Jews of Modernity*, pp. 66, 91.

47. Fisher, "Continuity and Erosion of Jewish Liberalism," p. 326; Isaacs, *Jews and American Politics*, p. 196.

as a loyal Communist pained by the destruction of his homeland, major Kopelev protested the vengeful behavior of the rampaging Soviet soldiers. He had believed in "the Socialist morality of our army," but, for calling attention to the dishonor, Kopelev was forced to spend nine years in Soviet prisons for what his interrogator labelled "bourgeois humanism."⁴⁸

No other phrase is as precise or as evocative in summing up the Jewish style in American politics as well. No other phrase more aptly describes the Jewish struggle to imagine a society in which the right to be equal is secured, without threatening the freedom to be different. Because Jews are primarily middle class, their transcription of prophetic standards of righteousness has necessarily been incomplete, inexact and unsatisfactory. Because they are influenced by humanism, too, they do offer reassurance that the thirst for justice has not yet been slaked and that complacency has not utterly triumphed among them. Since these are generalizations, exceptions must also be granted: there are plenty of illiberal Jews, bigoted Jews, philistine Jews, even *Realpolitik*ing rabbis. The relative absence — or dormancy — of anti-Semitism, combined with secure location above the poverty level for the majority of Jews, enlarges the danger that an individualist ethos and smugness may outstrip awareness of the plight of others. But, on the whole, their ballots and their beliefs reflect a desire to make the good life more compatible with an open society, and if "bourgeois humanism" were ever declared a crime in the United States, many more Jews could also be found guilty.

48. Lev Kopelev, *To Be Preserved Forever* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1977), p. 102.

The Liberal and The Lady: Esther Revisited

JONATHAN MAGONET

BRITISH JEWRY IS A RELATIVELY SMALL community, and Liberal Judaism in England represents only a fraction of it. Nevertheless, the movement boasts of several eminent figures of whom perhaps the most creative was Claude Goldsmid Montefiore (1859–1939). Scion of one of the most distinguished Jewish families of modern times, Montefiore dedicated considerable talents and energies to the study of Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism which led him to share in the fashioning of Liberal Judaism in Great Britain. Together with Herbert Loewe, he edited *The Rabbinic Anthology*, an extensive selection of the Aggadah from the Talmud and the Midrash, with helpful notes and references. His boundless reverence for the Bible is expressed in his popular book, *The Bible For Home Reading*.¹

However, in common with many readers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, from earliest times to the present, he found difficulties with the book of *Esther*.

[W]hen we come to examine, to weigh and to test, then, just as the great and noble things of the Bible grow greater and nobler still, so the human weaknesses inherent in every human work become also clearly revealed. In the case of the Bible, as well as in the case of every other book, our duty is to do homage to the God of truth and of goodness. We must “nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice.” As regards the Book of Esther, both errors have been committed. On the one hand, its religious and moral deficiencies have been ignored or explained away; on the other, they have been exaggerated and falsely labelled. Just because of these deficiencies it has been called by enemies of the Jews and of the Jewish religion the most specifically Jewish book of the Hebrew Bible, and it is still so called to this day. But this is both inaccurate and unjust.²

Montefiore was ready to admire Esther for her willingness to sacrifice herself on behalf of her people,³ but he objected to the nationalistic overtones of the book and when it came to the revenge enacted by the Jews, he expressed himself most strongly:

We can hardly dignify or extenuate the operations of the Jews by saying that they were done in self-defence. For we are told that all the officials

1. Claude G. Montefiore, *The Bible for Home Reading* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1899, 1907).

2. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 386.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 395.

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helped the Jews, and that none durst withstand them. Moreover, the slain apparently included both women and children. There is no fighting, but just as there was to have been a massacre of unresisting Jews, so now there is a massacre of unresisting Gentiles.⁴

Since he read the book as a non-historical document, he recognized that this slaughter was “a purely paper one,”⁵ but in his final evaluation he concludes:

The true reasons why we cannot regard the book of Esther as divine or inspired are, first, because of the spirit of cruelty and of revenge, so that it is not too strong to say with Dr. Adeney that “its last pages reek with blood;” and, secondly, because there is little compensation for this grave defect in any grandeur or beauty of teaching elsewhere.⁶

In these attitudes he reflects similar views held in the contemporary Christian world which can be traced back, in part, to Luther’s famous condemnation of the book, and which are to be found still today among Bible scholars.⁷

It is important at the outset to correct the view that the Jews in the book “massacred women and children,” following Robert Gordis’ reading of the relevant passage (*Esther* 8:11) as an included quotation — the Jews are to defend themselves against those who seek to destroy “them, their women and their children.”⁸ And, indeed, there are numerous other instances where recent scholarship forces us to re-examine both our assumptions as to the content and nature of the book and our attitude towards it. Some of these findings will be discussed in the rest of this paper.

First, there is a feature of the book to which Montefiore fails to draw attention, though it is a well-known phenomenon. This is the borrowing of material — both in terms of themes and actual word usage from other places in the Bible — namely, the story of Joseph in Egypt, the account of Samuel, Saul and Agag, King of the Amalekites (*I Samuel* 15), and the book of *Daniel*. The presence of such borrowing is noted in most modern commentaries but perhaps without always giving it sufficient attention.⁹ Certainly the facts of the close connection with the Joseph stories were available to Montefiore from a series of articles published by L.A. Rosenthal in the *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* of 1895 and

4. *Ibid.*, p. 403.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 405.

7. Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1970), p. 255; Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), p. 747; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction*, tr. P.R. Ackroyd (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), p. 511.

8. Robert Gordis, *Megillat Esther* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1972), p. 55. For the philological and exegetical evidence supporting this view of the passage (8:11), see R. Gordis, “Studies in the Esther Narrative,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 95 (1976): 49-53.

9. See, for example, Moshe Gan, “The Book of Esther in the Light of the Story of Joseph in Egypt,” *Tarbis*, 31 (1961): 144-149 (Eng. summary p. i-ii).

1897.¹⁰

Now it is possible to see the basis of the connection with Joseph solely in terms of both being examples of the “historical-wisdom tale,” which presumably means that the dominant wisdom motif in both has led the writer of *Esther* to model his tale on that of Joseph only in so far as both stories exemplify “the realization of wisdom precepts in practical life.” (So Shamaryahu Talmon in his important article “‘Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther.”¹¹) Yet such considerations do not apply in the Agag-Saul connection, which is equally strongly echoed in *Esther* — some of the implications of which were spelled out by Mrs. Ariella Goldberg of Bar Ilan (in a lecture delivered at University College in 1977).

Clearly, this extra dimension of historical reminiscence, which is deeply built into the book of *Esther*, should not be lightly set aside, especially when we compare it with a similar phenomenon in two other late Biblical works, namely *Ruth* and *Jonah*. In the former, we witness the reworking of the tale of Judah and Tamar and, behind even that, the incestuous relationship of Lot and his daughters which produced Moab, the ancestor of Ruth. There, quite clearly, the origins of David, the messianic king, are being re-examined, and Ruth and Boaz act out the former inappropriate sexual encounters, but this time behave with propriety, thus performing a sort of *tikkun*, a repair of the former actions. In *Jonah*, the universalistic vision of the author is reinforced by examining the problem of *teshuvah* and of the relationship between Israel and the outside world, through citations drawn from *Exodus* (the children of Israel before the Red Sea), *Jeremiah* and the story of Elijah. Without trying to build too elaborate a theory on this basis, it is quite clear that the Agag reminiscences in *Esther* are also an attempt at a *tikkun* of the failure of Saul to destroy Amalek when he had the opportunity. In those stories, as Ariella Goldberg points out, Saul fails to destroy Amalek and, furthermore, the people, under his weak and ineffectual leadership, are allowed to plunder the Amalekites. In *Esther*, not only is Haman despatched, but his ten sons are also, and three times we are told emphatically that no booty was taken. I would like to do no more than raise the question as to whether we have here another sort of messianic concept working under the surface, linking Joseph and Saul (the Rachel tribes) to Mordecai and the final destruction of Amalek — which call to mind the later Rabbinic figure of the *Mashiah ben Yosef* who will die in combat with the enemies of God and Israel and whose coming precedes that of the *Mashiah ben David*.

Clearly, one cannot push such points too far, but they do hint at underlying depths to the book that are ignored at our peril if we are to take the Bible seriously. In fact, there is a clear danger in any one-dimensional or surface reading of such texts as *Esther*, or, for that matter,

10. L.A. Rosenthal, “Die Josephgeschichte mit den Büchern Ester und Daniel verglichen,” ZAW, 15 (1895): 278-284; ZAW, 17 (1897): 126-128.

11. Shemaryahu Talmon, “Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther,” VT, 13 (1963): 419-455, 454 ff.

any Bible book. I am not concerned here with the fact that it is possible to use the most unlikely text to read in all sorts of valuable religious, ethical and moral lessons, but, rather, to take note of the latest work of literary critics who have been increasingly studying the Bible. The greatest sin, in their eyes, is to categorise what is, after all, a work of art, as if it were merely one-dimensional, a sort of dressed-up homily. David Rauber, in a study of *Ruth*, notes the error of discovering a "single message" in such works. He writes:

[U]nder these assertions is an hubristic assumption that for a work of high literary art we can say with confidence, "The purpose of X is . . ." and fill in the blank with 25 words or less. It is, I maintain, one of the main functions of the literary critic to oppose this view. The task of the literary critic is to explore the complex world of the artist and to suggest ways in which we can respond as fully as possible to its multiplicity, its suggestiveness, its richness. But all that is denied us if, lurking in the back of our minds is the secret conviction that art is really little more than the decorative embellishment of the prosaic, that the purpose of a great artist can be reduced to copybook maxims.¹²

Now, we may debate what degree of artistic merit the book of *Esther* has, but Rauber's stricture holds. If we approach it with a one-dimensional view of what it ought to be about, if we dictate to it in advance that being a religious book it ought to "pay homage to the God of truth and goodness,"¹³ that it ought to contain "true and original thoughts or teachings about goodness and God"¹⁴ then it is to ourselves that we are listening, and not to the book of *Esther*. In a book sanctioned by Rabbinic predecessors no less sensitive to ethical and moral issues than ourselves, as Montefiore is often at pains to point out, it is our own reflection that we are looking at and not seeking to find behind the literary veil the face of God. For, although this approach is perhaps the opposite of the sin of eisegesis, reading in more than is there, it deserves the same criticism that Ishmael ben Elisha gave to Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: "*Harey at omer lakatuv: Shtok ad she'edrosh,*" "Truly you say to Scripture: 'Be silent while I am expounding!'" (*Sifre to Lev 13:47*). Or, as expressed by Professor John Bright in his critical but sympathetic evaluation of the approach to the Old Testament of 19th century liberal Christianity:

To approach the Old Testament in this way is to do it great violence. It is to find its contribution primarily in its ethical principles, moral values, and religious ideas, and thus to fail to do justice to its true intent. It is to impose upon it an extraneous canon of evaluation of our own making and, in the end, to patronise it. . . .¹⁵

This is not to say that *Esther* is the greatest religious masterpiece in Scripture, but it is to draw attention to one other exegetical approach that

12. D.F. Rauber, "Literary Values in the Bible: The Book of Ruth," JBL, 89 (1970): 27-37, 36.

13. Montefiore, *Op. cit.*, p. 386.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 404.

15. John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1967), p. 107.

Montefiore does not deal with. He rightly discusses the problem of whether the book is to be regarded as history or as a story. What he does not discuss is the genre or *gattung* of the work, a concept already being explored in his time by Gunkel. The point to be made here is that in transposing a work from the Bible to our own time it is not only the language that we have to translate, with all the pitfalls implicit in that task — one, incidentally, which makes us highly sensitive to the possibilities for ambiguity in interpretation. Beyond that, one is really attempting to translate a symbolic language, one in which the cultural assumptions of a totally alien society must also be assessed in attempting to interpret the meaning of actions and events in our own quite different terms. And more than that, since the material is given to us through a literary medium, we must occupy ourselves with assessing the conventions and usages of that literature before passing judgment on its contents. At its most obvious, generations of Bible scholars re-wrote the Psalms and other Biblical poetry in iambic pentameters because they had not first attempted to investigate the conventions of Biblical poetry. Now, clearly, sensitivity to such literary aspects is something that has grown since Montefiore's work, and no criticism can be levelled against him, but it is unfortunate to find contemporary scholars who continue to study *Esther* as if nothing had changed.

All of which is to point to the fact that one way of examining the book of *Esther* is to place it within the category of Wisdom literature and then, within those conventions, much of what seems either obscure or even unpleasant becomes comprehensible. Here is not the place to elaborate on this beyond referring once again to the excellent article of Talmon as a starting point for an approach to *Esther*. Though, again, we run the risk of creating a new dogma: the recognition of the type of literature we are dealing with is not an ultimate judgment on it. After all, the author of the book of *Jonah* relies for his efforts on the reversal of contemporary literary conventions that make the prophet the "goodie" and the people he speaks to the "baddies." Furthermore, even the Wisdom structure of *Esther* is broken open at times by introducing other than the usual practical success ethic, as Talmon points out.

Esther and Mordecai contrast Haman not only in their role of true sages, but also in their capacities as representative of "goodness." Theirs is not the goodness of absolute morality. Such a concept would not square with the type of wisdom exemplified in the story. Their virtues become apparent in the subjection of their private interests to the requirements of the communal weal, whereas Haman was prepared to sacrifice a nation in order to satisfy his personal hatred of one man. The "evil Haman" (*Esther*, 7:6) whose intentions are vile (7:4; 9:24) is opposed by Mordecai whom all his brothers welcome and who "seeks good for his people" (10:3). The victory of Mordecai and Esther over Haman is a double score: the sage vanquishes the apparent wise, and the goodly just the evildoer. It therefore constitutes a valid reason for the jubilation of the Jews in Susa and throughout the empire (8:15-17; 9:18-19): "when the righteous prosper a city rejoices, and

when the wicked perish there is cheer" (*Proverbs* 11:10).¹⁶

Now, what are the characteristics that we must expect in a "historical-wisdom tale"? Talmon describes the central struggle:

What is ultimately at stake is the position of one of the two (Haman or Mordecai) at court. The contest will be decided upon not by moral superiority or by divine grace, but rather by a ruthless application of all the ruses found in the book of the "wise" courtier: "For with cunning thou shalt make war; and in ample counsel there is victory" (*Proverbs* 24:6). The more seasoned and better skilled will prevail. Success assures of the good-will of the king who judges by tangible results and not by motives: The king's favor is given to a wise (successful) servant, and his wrath to the malefactor (*Proverbs* 14:35). The court is a slippery arena in which to fight. The rules are set by the king: "For the king's word hath power, and who may say unto him 'what doest thou?'" (*Ecclesiastes* 8:4), and vanquished and victor are decided upon by his whims: "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion; but his favor is as dew upon the grass" (*Proverbs* 18:12).¹⁷

What Talmon does not do in his study is analyze in detail the stratagem of Mordecai, and for this I am grateful to a Shabbat discussion with Rabbi Dr. König in Amsterdam some years ago. I suppose that the central problem focuses on the question posed in the Talmud as to the character of Ahasuerus. *Melekh pikeah hayah; v'had amar, melekh tipesh hayah* — was he wise or was he a fool?¹⁸ There seems to be much evidence to support the latter view — his extravagance, his wild rages in which he does things like sending Vashti away, to his later regret; his apparent blindness to the actions of his advisers, allowing Haman to condemn an entire people. On the other hand, it might be argued that he is, after all, a survivor in a very precarious situation of court intrigues and attempted assassinations. When he invites Haman to lead Mordecai through the streets, is he merely the unwitting tool of God, or does he have his own ulterior motive? If I may *précis* what I recall of Rabbi König's thesis, which in turn goes back to midrash, Ahasuerus must be seen as at least a shrewd man. The dominating problem that he must face is survival, and that requires maintaining a balance of potential rivals to the throne, allowing each one to cancel out the other. The spectacular rise of Haman is something that carries dangerous implications for this balance — a motif frequently seen in wisdom literature. Mordecai, aware of this, seems to set about preparing himself to become the necessary counterbalancing figure. It is, thus, not accidental that he discovers the plot to assassinate the king and makes sure that due warning is given. It is also possible that his refusal to bow before Haman, instead of having a religious basis, is a further ploy to establish himself as someone who does not kow-tow to the powerful vizier.

16. Talmon, *Op. cit.*, p. 448.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 433.

18. *Megillah* 12a.

Perhaps this reading becomes clearest at the climactic moment when Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet. It has sometimes been suggested that the double invitation is evidence of a duplication and points to two original stories that have been fused by the author. Be that as it may, a careful reading shows that two meetings are essential. Here we must pay attention to the exact wording of Esther's two invitations which seem identical, at first glance, but contain one highly significant difference. In 5:4 she says "*Yavo hamelekh v'Haman el hamishte'ah asher asiti lo.*" "Let the king and Haman come to the banquet I have prepared for *him* (namely the king)." But when she repeats the request that first evening she says (5:8): "*Yavo hamelekh v'Haman el hamishte'ah asher e'eseh lahem*" ". . . the feast I shall prepare *for them*." In that change from "*lo*" (for him) to "*lahem*" (for them), that change from a banquet for the king to which Haman is invited, to a banquet for both of them equally, are focused all the fears of the tyrant king. Not jealousy about Esther being in love with Haman, but, rather, fear of a coup — for when the queen starts showing an undue interest in the number-two man, it is time for the king to get worried. And, thus, it is no coincidence that that night the king cannot sleep! Nor is it surprising that he sends for the book of chronicles — not because he needs a light read to send him to sleep, but because he is looking desperately for a rival to set up against Haman, someone, too, who has shown loyalty and the ability to discover dangerous plots against his life — and he finds Mordecai. Furthermore, imagine his anxiety when, in the middle of the night, there, waiting in the courtyard, is none other than Haman himself. Is it now the time for the coup itself? The midrash¹⁹ hits the nail on the head when it comments on Haman's answer to the king's question about what the king should do to a man whom he wishes to honor. "At the moment when Haman said 'Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear . . . and the horse which the king rideth upon, and upon the head of which a royal crown is set . . .' (6:8), just when he mentioned the 'royal crown,' the king's face fell and he said: 'His time is here already!'"

Surely it is no coincidence that the king at once orders Haman to do just this to Mordecai whom he emphatically calls "*hayehudi*," "the Jew," knowing full well that he is thus conferring honor on the enemy of Haman, whose entire race Haman wished to exterminate.

Now it might be argued that this line of interpretation merely increases the secular underpinning of the book and thus makes it even more problematic as a religious work; nevertheless, "the best laid plans of mice and men . . ." It still requires divine providence to allow all of the various stratagems to work out, or not to work out, so that the Jews are saved. But by opening this dimension, we are allowed to approach the book from a different perspective.

19. *Kohélet Rabbah* on *Ecclesiastes* 5:2.

It paints for us not merely a fantasy world out of *A Thousand and One Nights*, but the very real world of political intrigue, compromises and power struggles that are the background in which the drama of two thousand years of Jewish existence in the Diaspora has been played out. It is not a world of ethics or morality, but of relative ethics and the values of survival. In a world of capricious monarchs and tyrants, and there is clearly a bitter undercurrent to the book which should not be ignored, for all its surface charm, in such a world survival depends on divine providence, but also on precautions and subtlety and favor. It is a world where things are not judged by criteria of good or bad, but by the ethics of the seven-times repeated statement "*im al hamelekh tov*" — if it be pleasing to the king!²⁰ It is a world all too familiar to us as the stage on which Jewish lives were gambled for less than forty years ago, and in which statesmanship and a good secret service have to go hand in hand with piety and the ethics of "the lesser of two evils." Esther, in the jargon of today's spy stories, is a "sleeper," someone placed secretly in a position of power until she is needed, and to judge her behavior in abstract moral terms is to misunderstand the choices that she has to make.

I have my own theory about the notorious second day of fighting that Esther requests. It is to extend the law to the rest of the city of Shushan and not merely to the citadel, which suggests that there are enemies there who are still dangerous and that it is not merely a bloodthirsty whim. But, more significantly, dangerous to whom? For her request comes, not at her own initiative, but in response to what seems a leading question from the king. Surely it is to his advantage that whatever members of Haman's faction that might still be plotting should also be put away, for, after all, it is Haman himself who has spoken of a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of the kingdom (3:8). It is interesting how careful a record the king has kept of events and of the number killed, and how it is the officials of the various countries who help the Jews. It reminds us that, however great Mordecai may seem to be at the moment, his power is there only because the king backs it — and it might be argued that Esther's decision is as much a bowing to a political necessity forced upon her by the king as to any "bloodthirstiness" that she shows. The violence that she displays is only a reflection of the violence implicit in the system into which she has been cast. It is the violence of tyranny that corrupts everyone who is part of it. It is the violence of the unredeemed world ruled by human kings in which the invisible King of Kings is not readily to be found. In such a world, the only way to assert other values is to insist that the festival that is to be instituted should take place, not on the day of the fighting itself, but when the fighting is over. It is the day after that is set aside for rejoicing; it is the deliverance that is celebrated, not the killing that had to accompany it (9:22).

20. 1:19; 3:9; 5:4,8; 7:3; 8:5; 9:13.

I am not offering this interpretation as a way of exonerating Esther. The argument that one was only "obeying orders" cannot be upheld. But what it does do is locate the source of violence outside of the will of Esther or Mordecai and in the nature of the regime, of their society itself. For Ahasuerus read Idi Amin. What I am trying to show is that we are thrown into the heart of a real problem of contemporary ethics; the text is problematic, and it *does* raise difficult questions. And it seems to me that, for that reason alone, it should take its place alongside other Bible passages that either directly or indirectly raise questions about violence, power struggles or conquest. For on the criterion of teaching "goodness" we would have to scrap from the Bible most of the historical books, large parts of the Torah and many of the greatest psalms.

Let us now take a second look at something which we have already observed and indicate another level on which our book functions. I refer to King Ahasuerus' worries about Haman, prompted by his mentioning "the crown." In contemporary parlance, Haman has made a Freudian slip, revealing what are his own secret motivations, ones that he has perhaps hardly dared admit yet to himself. He wants the crown, he wants to be the king — this king whose title is mentioned almost two hundred times in the book, this king around whom all the events revolve. It is worth pausing a few moments to look at some other things in Haman's unconscious. We forget that the information that he is an Agagite tells us not only that he comes from the line of Israel's enemies, but also that he, too, is an outsider in the Persian court. When he speaks of a people scattered throughout the land whose laws are different from those of every other people (3:8), he is also describing, in a projection, some aspect of his own outsider status. And we can see the depth of his insecurity in the pathetic way he boasts to his wife and friends (who surely know it already) about his wealth, his many sons and his prestige at court (5:11) — only to add how all this means nothing to him whenever he sees Mordecai the Jew, the one man who has refused to acknowledge his power, the one man who, by his own existence, reminds him of his outsider status. For Haman, too, is insecure, part of a minority group, relying on his wealth or other keys to power to maintain his position, ready to invent a scapegoat to insure the continuance of his power. Haman is nothing more than the alternative face of Mordecai, a distorted reflection of the same character. The two are brothers under the skin — and perhaps it is that deeper relationship that Rava is pointing towards when he says that a man is obliged to drink so much wine on Purim that he becomes incapable of knowing whether he is cursing Haman or blessing Mordecai.²¹ (Incidentally it is worth reminding ourselves that a similar double image can be found in the book of *Judges* where the stories of Abimelech and of Jephthah are clearly juxtaposed for purposes of comparison. Both come from similar back-

21. *Megillah* 7b.

grounds as rejected outsiders, but, whereas Abimelech connives his way to power and becomes a treacherous despot, Jephthah is democratically elected and becomes a cherished and successful leader.)

There are innumerable other dimensions to the book of *Esther* which could be analyzed, and I hope that the study of Ariella Goldberg will soon be available so that some of her observations can be further examined. But enough has been said to suggest that, in order to do justice to the book, it does not suffice to read it on the surface level only and ignore the connections with other parts of the Bible, the relationship to wisdom teachings, the psychological underpinnings, the various literary dimensions, etc., etc. If we are content to treat the Megillah as a funny book to be read once a year, then perhaps we are entitled to dismiss it. But if we are to treat it with the seriousness, imagination and care with which every book of the Bible should be approached, then it has much to teach and, more important, many profound and far-reaching questions to ask of us.

Exile and Redemption: A Secular Zionist View

BEN HALPERN

SHARON MULLER'S EXCELLENT REVIEW OF MY writings in the Summer, 1978 issue of *JUDAISM* gives me an occasion to do something I have long felt under obligation to do. Ever since the first collected, systematic presentation of my position (*The American Jew, a Zionist Analysis*, 1955), perceptive friends and critics have noted the paradoxes involved when a professed secular Zionist chooses *galut* as the central concept that makes the whole Jewish experience meaningful. Ms. Muller puts it very directly:

If the essence of Jewish life . . . is consciousness of *galut*, then, by applying the Zionist solution one has overcome the central problem of the Jewish people — but, at the same time, left it without a *raison d'être* and without a normative view of Jewish life.

The same basic difficulty and many of the related problems succinctly stated in this summary critique were posed when the late Harold Rosenberg initially reviewed the book, and when he and Arthur Hertzberg discussed it in 1956; and they have been noted by others since.

I have dealt with a number of the subordinate issues from time to time but not directly with the central one. What I have had to say on particular points might tend to reinforce rather than to dissipate the impression that an acute critic would derive of internal contradiction in my Zionist system. I therefore welcome the opportunity to respond to the main issue, so clearly set forth in the Muller article.

I shall not deal at length with one comment that Ms. Muller, like Rosenberg years ago, makes on my claim to be a socialist. The complaint which they both make, that for a socialist I pay very little attention to economic issues, is based on equating socialism with Marxism. A. D. Gordon, and not Karl Marx, is my spiritual father, and the social principle of mutual responsibility, rather than the economics of distributive justice, represents the core of my socialist concerns. I shall have to defer further comment. Zionism is enough for the present discussion.

One could easily dismiss the demand that a secular Zionism provide a "normative view of Jewish life" or even a "vision or blueprint of a revitalized Jewish culture" — especially when the demand applies both to Israel and to America. I have been clear enough, I think, in stating that no true Jewish culture but only a cult can be sustained in America; and that the fundamental condition for a "revitalized" Jewish culture already exists

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in Israel where Hebrew is the language of an integral, organic society.* The point that deserves further clarification, perhaps, is the demand that I define a “normative view of Jewish life.”

The easy answer to this demand is that the hallmark of a secular culture is precisely its freedom from normative restrictions on its content. I have had occasion to reject proposals — for example, by Mordecai M. Kaplan — to define the content of Jewishness as fixed even in the socialist Zionist institutions of the Histadrut. Such proposals would deny the unity of the actually existing Jewish people and sterilize the creative potential of a living culture by reducing it to a cult. But, while true enough, such a response would not meet the challenge of critics on their own terms; and I, too, am well enough aware of complexities in the Jewish situation for which a far more refined response is required.

Reduced to its simplest terms, Zionism aims to make a normal — that is, an ordinary — nation out of the Jewish people. That aim, for Zionism, encounters its inherent limit (and thus, cannot be achieved in full) owing to the fact that the “Jewish people” is essentially constituted by the Jewish religion. By this one no longer means, of course, that all Jews believe in or practice Judaism, in any of its current versions. But (a sociological fact recognized by the Israeli Supreme Court in a crucial decision), if one is born Jewish, only conversion to another religion can terminate that connection; and conversion to Judaism makes a Jew out of a Gentile. Thus, Judaism serves to define the outer limits of the “Jewish people” whether or not those included profess or practice Judaism. Moreover, while all Jews may not follow Judaism, all who do follow are Jews: *i.e.*, the Jewish religion is confined to a single ethnic or national community. This fact has a severely complicating effect on the issue under discussion.

The history of nationalism in Europe, the model for Zionism and other recent nationalist movements, has meant the displacement of religious norms from a variety of political and cultural spheres of life. The dominance of kings and parliaments in national affairs was gained at the expense of the church, and national languages, arts, histories, and literatures supplanted the universal culture of the religious communion. However, nationalism did not eliminate certain universal aspects of European culture through local, particularistic substitutions. Science, for one thing, was the fruit of a common European civilization. What also was shared in common, by European nations, in spite of regional denominational differences, were the normative symbol-systems of their Christian heritage. The nation (before the Soviet and Nazi regimes) did not pretend (in spite of Mazzini) to supply universal ethical norms, and its heroes (even Napoleon) were peculiarly its own and were not apotheosized as demigods for all of humanity. For the exemplars of truly universal values, like uprightness and saintliness, the nationalist societies of Europe looked

* I shall not burden the discussion with citations for this and similar references to my past statements, but they can be supplied to interested persons.

to Christian and humanistic traditions common to them all. Saint George, Saint Joan and the other patron saints of European nations are heroes in their national histories and myths, but saints by virtue of the universal Catholic calendar.

Precisely in the sense that Christian values were involved, they were unavailable to Jews and Jewish nationalists. To symbolize universal values, and not merely historical and relative values such as the arts and literature and language, Jewish nationalists must necessarily look to their unique religious tradition. The saints and martyrs who are so frequently the heroes of Jewish history are canonical only (except when appropriated for their own use, and thus alienated, by others) in a Jewish tradition neither shared nor often acknowledged by the others. Jewish secular national culture is necessarily committed to its "particularistic" tradition not only in regions of historical, relative values but also in its universal value symbols.

Let me make clear at once that it is not, in my view, a matter of a well-defined, normative value-content to which the national secular culture has to adhere. Universal values are universal across religious civilizations as well as across national cultures. Neither the secularist Aḥad Ha'am nor the theologians who have tried to define the substantive essence of Judaism carry any conviction for me. Religious civilizations, and Judaism among them, differ less in the content and substantive norms of their value systems than in the style and symbolisms of value expression. Such styles are prescriptive, though not in the same way as substantive norms. Actions may or may not conform to the principles valued within a culture and yet be equally authentic within its style. Whatever the values and principles that a culture prescribes as norms, they are only authentically its own if they are expressed in symbols true to its own experience — that is, in its own authentic style. And since such styles often clash, or are competitive, Jewish nationalism (like the new nationalism of non-Western civilizations) must seek authenticity, where this is the case, by rooting itself in its own, and not Christian, civilization in its expression of universal values.

It follows that even after Zionism has overcome the anomaly of Jewish national homelessness, the Jews, unlike other normal nations, remain isolated. They clash with all others, and not only with some, precisely in those symbolisms through which they express universal values. In spite of the energy invested in promoting the idea of the Judeo-Christian heritage, there is no other people with whom the Jews can share what the Arabs, Iranians, and Turks, or the English, French, and Russians share with each other. This isolation is an irreducible residue of the essential objective condition of Jewish life, to which the concept of *galut* once gave profound significance.

When I say, more directly, that *galut* is the essence of the Jewish historical experience, and particularly when I demand that Jews cultivate

a sense of exile as a condition of authentic Jewishness, it naturally raises questions in the mind of critics. Rosenberg and Hertzberg noted that, after emancipation and the creation of the State of Israel, Jews could not be called “exiles” literally, and they extracted the admission that I mean only a metaphysical *galut*. Sharon Muller makes a similar point with a triple question: How can one require acceptance of an essential Jewishness without belief in God; how can one derive *galut* as an essence from the mere flow of history; and if Jews feel comfortable in their life among the Gentiles and are under no obligation to God, why should they have to accept alienation?

Let me respond first by making a preliminary point. No one who accepts the traditional concept of *galut*, “exile,” implies that this condition is in itself desirable, or that unreserved acceptance of it is normative. *Galut* is there to be redeemed by *geulah*. Exile is neither a principle to be obeyed nor an end to be sought. It is, rather, a condition to be overcome. And yet, while it exists, it has a prescriptive function; and the Jewish tradition knows of commandments in observance of *galut*. *Galut*, in short, is a matter of the Jewish style. It is the concept that most meaningfully — that is, essentially — sums up the style of Jewish historical experience among the Gentiles. To live under the sign of *galut* is to be authentically Jewish, to identify with the self-image of the Jewish people collectively forged over the centuries. The “obligation” which it bears, and which sustains it, is the obligation everyone has to be oneself.

But what we are all confronted with is that our own experience, day by day, no longer reinforces but undermines the self-image that history has offered us in the conception of *galut*. Neither the daily experience of Jews in Israel nor that of emancipated Jews in the free countries (there are, of course, others — especially for Jews) gives substance to the concept that such Jews are in exile. Yet, as noted earlier, neither free and sovereign Israelis nor the emancipated Jews in the free countries have, or, conceivably, can, overcome the essential isolation of the Jews, rooted as they are in the uniquely Jewish symbol-set of their own historic civilization. This condition is an irreducible residue, as noted earlier, of the “exile” and “chosenness” of the Jews, a people constituted by a religious civilization which they share with no one else and which defines them all, whether they follow it or not, so long as they have not replaced it with another positive religious commitment.

Compared with “exile,” isolation is a severely impoverished conception; but it also reduces the essential definition of the Jewish condition to its ultimate, elemental components. Two basic elements are involved in both the exile and the isolation of the Jews: their exposure, which endangers them, and their identity, which preserves them. Both in Israel and in the free Diaspora, where there is no longer “exile” in a literal sense, Jewish isolation remains. What the same isolation means to each, however, is widely different, both in fact and in their perception of it. In Israel, the

physical separation of the Jews in a total milieu of their own guarantees their identity; but because it is based on a moral separation as well, their isolation is a political and military threat to their safety. Emancipated Jews living in a Gentile milieu can secure their identity only through moral separation, but because their separation is based, inconsistently, on their political integration, the roots of their identity are not nourished. Isolation, which for Israel is a clear and present danger to be overcome, is, for the emancipated Diaspora Jews, a condition of their meaningful survival insufficiently guaranteed by the milieu that they live in.

Let me put the same point differently. I have referred to a criterion of "authenticity" as the prescriptive norm for self-identification, but have not explicitly defined the term. To be "authentic" a self-image must meet two requirements: it must function within the style of the historical civilization with which the self identifies, and it must reflect, respond to, and function within the milieu in which the self lives. (I do not wish to deny the possibility that there may be aesthetic or other values in inauthenticity. The Jewish intellectuals who have made a fetish of "alienation" have been among those who seek to demonstrate that possibility, but have not, in my opinion, contributed to authentic Jewish culture.) We may now ask: How, considered in these terms, can Israel or the Jews of the free countries remain authentically Jewish?

If, as I hold, the concept of *galut* epitomizes centuries of Jewish history, then both Israel and the emancipated Jewries have broken away from the essential pattern of the past. Each, indeed, accuses the other of having abandoned authentic Jewishness by rejecting the symbol-set of *galut*, and in both cases there is some justification for the charge. It is far easier for Israel than for Diaspora Jewries to recognize this charge and respond to it. The Israeli founding fathers themselves recognized that, together with their old bondage, they had, in their youthful militancy, discarded many historic memories of the long travail that could enrich the style of a revitalized Jewish culture. It did not need cavils and carping from abroad to make them institute educational programs for heightening "Jewish consciousness;" though, to be sure, the immediate effect of these programs, in the usual manner of prefabricated culture, was to propagate clichés and instil "false consciousness."

However, if *galut* was rejected, *geulah* — the twin concept that implies the other and equally embodies the memories and historical experience that both together express — was ever present in the daily labors and recurrent crises of Israeli life. This was more easily perceived in the early years of Zionist pioneering than in recent times, which have been complicated by the problems of rapid development and statehood. The social institutions created by Zionist pioneers allowed them, as well as those who identified or sympathized with them in the Diaspora, a ready identification with Israel's prophetic tradition; and this was a connection especially welcomed by liberal, Reform Jews in America whose doctrine required

such an identification and whose own milieu made it difficult to find an authentically Jewish functional application for their prophetism. The once-clear image, as already noted, has been complicated and obscured, both for Israelis and Jews in the Diaspora, but the function of the Jewish ethical tradition and its unique symbol-set remains even more vital in Israel than before. Israel cannot but be authentically Jewish in the degree that it confronts its own problems honestly.

The situation of Diaspora Jews is far more ambiguous in this respect. Emancipated Jews cannot easily acknowledge that the end of exile has cut them off from historic Jewish traditions, and the efforts of Israelis to remind them of this fact serve only to irritate, and not to stimulate, them. Their milieu does not challenge them, as the Israelis are challenged, to overcome *galut* in ways that reflect the correlative traditional conception of *geulah*. They are driven to deny, rather than to reject, the essential past of the Jews epitomized in the concept of *galut*, and they seek to justify their state of being through the inauthentic idea of dispersion as a Jewish mission. This idea is not only false to Jewish history as the Jewish self-image has perceived it; the notion of a mission of dispersion, of an exemplary prophetic role that the Diaspora performs, is blatantly inauthentic as a reflection of the actual life of Jews and has no functional relation to their actual problems. The prerequisite condition for an authentic Jewish life in the Diaspora is to recognize that Jewish isolation continues in another form the essential condition of Jewish history, more richly represented by the concept of *galut*. To be an authentic Jew and a prophet to the Gentiles means to play the part of Jonah, the reluctant prophet. Trying to play that part in full and unreserved commitment means to become Paul.

Isolation, like exile, is a condition that, by its very nature, demands to be overcome. To overcome it in the process of *geulah*, by achieving universal recognition of the Jewish self-redemption from bondage, is authentically Jewish. Isolation could also be overcome, conceivably, by assimilation. Realistically if not logically, there is no excluded middle between these two possibilities. In practice, the problematic contemporary situation of emancipated Jewries drives them constantly to seek such a middle way — and, in my opinion, drives them into dead-end byways of Jewish inauthenticity without resolving their problem of isolation.

For the Israelis, as noted, their need for peace and for full and equal international recognition is a functional imperative for their security and welfare. What barred the way to this goal for so long were precisely the clashing symbol systems of Judaism and Islam, not to speak of Christianity. Peace between Egypt and Israel requires a new flexibility that extends beyond strategic planning. In the case of Islamic countries it involves a revised symbolic understanding of a previously subject people, the Jews, and once exclusively possessed land, Palestine; and, particularly

with reference to Jerusalem, it demands similar revisions of time-hardened old conceptions among Christians as well as Jews. Israel's political isolation, the constant threat to its legitimacy, can be overcome only by an act of unquestionable Jewish authenticity: Israel must compel others to recognize it in its Jewishness, even as it cultivates a Jewish understanding of the authentic style of others.

The situation of emancipated Jewries in the Diaspora differs radically from that of Israel. Threats to their safety are not a reason that could cause them to fight for the legitimation of the unique, isolated Jewish symbol-system. With no need to struggle, they enjoy religious freedom implying, if not expressly stipulating, their right to abide in the moral isolation of their Jewishness. But their moral isolation entails their social isolation; and isolation alone, robbed of the rich symbolisms of *galut* and *geulah*, is not, for most Jews, an experience sufficiently stimulating to the imagination that it could make them accept social exclusion as a distinction. This ambiguous position produces the vague, pervasive malaise that is the driving force behind attempts of Diaspora Jews to overcome their isolation, not in the course of a struggle for more tangible and vital needs, like the Israelis, but in a direct campaign for symbolic reconciliation with the Gentiles.

The current form of this campaign, in which Jews make their own specific demands on the Christian ecumenical movement, is in the line of inheritance from the theological disputations of Jews and Gentiles in medieval times. Then, Jews were compelled to join in debate as defendants; and, as the late Harry Wolfson noted, the substantive argument as well as the procedural stance of the participants was asymmetrical. Judaism, the mother religion, had nothing of its own that had to be proven to its offshoot religions; but it had to defend its failure to be convinced of the doctrines proposed by its opponents. A similar asymmetry and polar relation, with Jews negating the positive positions of Gentiles, prevails today; but the matters at issue have been shifted, as have the roles of the participants in the procedure. The debate today is about the prejudicial image of the Jews in the Christian symbol-system; and, against the background of the Holocaust, it is the Jews who stand as accusers and plaintiffs.

A debate in such terms could be regarded, no doubt, as an analogue of Israel's battle to make the world accept a free Jewish nation in its own image. But those engaged in the ecumenicist battle, for all their individual militancy, mainly represent communities that have shown themselves ready to cut and trim, or simply abandon, Jewish symbols according to Gentile patterns. The point of the campaign, for such a clientele, would be, by inoculating the Gentiles with a dose of negative Judaism, to further a universalistic syncretism in which the positive features of Jewish and Gentile symbols alike would be neutralized — or, to echo Professor Wolfson again, to bury the differences, not the hatchet.

Seen from this perspective, what, on the surface, might look like (and under proper conditions could be) an authentic defense of the Jewish self-image, becomes one in a long series of efforts to abolish the Jewish-Gentile difference by an attack from both sides. Such efforts, from the early search for a "neutral society" in Freemasonry studied by Jacob Katz to the bohémias, countercultures, and cults of our own times, have not been able to combine the reciprocating negativisms of post-Jews and post-Christians in a lasting, positive structure. From my Zionist position, it does not appear that such attempts to have assimilation without eating it can succeed in the future either. We are guaranteed the continuous production of problematic specimens of the perennial Jewish problem in the Diaspora: on one hand, non-Jewish Jews who remain isolated for no reason that makes sense for them; on the other hand, cultists who, rather than seeking to overcome, seek to safeguard isolation in the name of a cult of exile that no longer is authentic in their milieu; and, between the two, a mass of troubled, loyal Jews who strive to live with their problematic condition in uneasy awareness of the inauthenticity of the expedients to which they resort.

From my Zionist point-of-view, I can favor no other than an ideological attitude toward this problem: one that seeks to solve it, rather than to live with it. But even in the critical situation of a German Jew in the 1930s, a Zionist like the late Giora Josephthal was aware that while Zionism was its *only* solution, the Jewish problem had no real and full solution. Certainly now, after so many years of Israel's freedom, it is clear that the Diaspora will long continue, and that Israel shares with the Diaspora the essential moral isolation of Judaism. Jewishness, then, continues to be a problem that Jews must live with; and an ideologue like myself, who deals only in solutions, may live with it in his own way, but not prescribe for others.

One cannot refuse, however, to judge, even if such judgment remains personal and non-binding on others. I have, I think, sufficiently indicated my judgments in passing, apart from one final one. The great danger to Jewishness in our time is not the irreducible isolation of Jews from Gentiles, but the isolation of Jews from each other. Aḥad Ha'am, who feared assimilation not so much as the fragmentation of the Jewish people, was right in this perception. An Israeli society that refuses to recognize the varieties of Jewish experience in the Diaspora and establishes an Orthodoxy which is inauthentic in the daily experience of many, if not most, Israelis, and a Diaspora made up of Jewries who cannot communicate with Israel in Hebrew and who are even more ignorant of each other, may well survive, but cannot survive meaningfully. If authenticity is truly desired, then it can be sustained only by a community that is open and that freely communicates in all of its parts.

The Wise Men of Helm

ISRAEL KNOX

HELM OCCUPIES A SPECIAL PLACE IN JEWISH folk-lore and humor. Its inhabitants are noted for their egregious "wisdom" — that is, wisdom as conceived, defined and acted upon in Helm itself. For the world at large the wisdom of Helm is wisdom only in the language of irony or make-believe; it is wisdom standing on its head, which is foolishness.

Helm is a definite place, located somewhere in Poland, but the Helm of folk-lore is autonomous and has neither ascertainable ties with the geographic one, nor historical correspondence. Just as tradition differentiates between *Yerushalayim shel matah* and *Yerushalayim shel ma'alah*, the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem, so there are two Helms — the physical and the imaginary — only it is hard to say which is the earthly one and which the heavenly one. If the wisdom of the imaginary Helm is just foolishness masquerading as wisdom, then it is Helm *shel matah*, indeed, and maybe less; but if its foolishness is really wisdom in disguise, wisdom masquerading as foolishness, then it is the heavenly Helm, the Helm *shel ma'alah*, "if not higher."

1. Foolish Things are Happening to Us

Helm has achieved immortal fame as the city of simpletons;¹ indeed, its very name is synonymous with foolishness. It is the home of men who appear to be untutored in the ways of the world, not to mention its subtleties. Of course, Helm holds no exclusive title to foolishness. It shares its renown with Gotham in English folklore and with similar towns in the folklore of other countries and cultures. And, yet, Helm with its "wise" men is as specific and distinctive as is Gotham with its "merry" men, as are the similar towns whose reputations rest upon their foolishness and whose fame is due to the simpletons that they produced.

The substance of humor is universal; its themes and fables recur in land after land, in age after age. They recur and they are universal, not as duplicates or copies, but as variations with a difference, as variations with an element of uniqueness. It is this element of uniqueness, this particular emphasis, which constitutes their charm and is the source of their wisdom.

1. There are various renditions of the Helmite tales. My own preference is for that of Solomon Simon: two volumes, translated into English from the Yiddish by Lillian Fischel and Stephen Kraft (Behrman House, Inc.). I.K.

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In humor, and especially in comparative humor, the manner certainly counts, but the *manner* affects the *matter*, and what might have been only an imitation turns out to be an initiation into the wisdom of a people, as distilled out of its collective and cumulative experience.

The simpletons of Helm are referred to as the wise men of Helm, and this is the language of irony, and when irony is dispensed with they are identified bluntly and directly as the simpletons of Helm. But may it not be perchance just the reverse? May it not be that the irony lies in calling the denizens of Helm simpletons? May it not be that there is a kinship between the irony implicit in branding the inhabitants of Helm as simpletons and the irony of Socrates in assenting that he is the wisest of men, but only so because he knows how little he knows, in contrast to the vast majority of men who take their ignorance to be sagacity?

Simpletons the Helmites may be in the eyes of those who presume that they themselves are levelheaded, but the Helmites somehow are not undiscerning of men's lot in the order of nature and of the human condition, and they are at least shrewd enough to recognize that the things which are happening to them are foolish things not so much because they, the Helmites, are foolish, but because it is the common predicament of all men to live as finite beings in a universe which is not wholly coequal with our comprehension, and that, hence, the order of nature must remain for us partly a disorder.

"We Helmites aren't fools. It's just that foolish things are always happening to us." What better plea could the Helmites offer for withdrawal from the market-places of the world, for a placid passivity with regard to the diverse issues that agitate the minds and hearts of men and require some sort of action, for an easy submission to the cosmic dialectic of Tao or Fate or Fortune or even Reason (in the Stoic sense). Irwin Cobb, in a mood of sad and whimsical humor, noted that it is rather odd that among the meager facts to be inscribed on a tombstone are the dates of a person's birth and death; he thought it odd because, of all the doings for which a person could be held accountable, these two surely were not of one's own willing and ought to be excluded.

To the simpletons of Helm, this would not be odd, although being simpletons and unskilled in the sophisticated use of words, they could not explain exactly why it is not so. They would not have any trouble inventing an answer, but its meaning would be accessible only to those who are fluent in the language — or is it the logic? — of Helm, which is the language of unintended irony. How they would put it is not for one unskilled in their style of speech — or is it in their type of thinking? — to say, but it would, in one fashion or another, tend to confirm the obligation of all men to participate in the market-places of the world, to accept responsibility in them, and to confront, with courage, the order of nature which exceeds our understanding, although it is a realm in which "foolish things are always happening to us."

It is fitting, the Helmites would contend, that the dates of our entrance into the world and our exit from it be inscribed on tombstones, for these dates mark out the limit of our existence. The *content* of our existence — the foolish and the good things that are of our own making and the foolish and good things that befall us — these are not for tombstones; these are for the world, and no formula or epitaph can contain them. If the Helmites were inclined to a reflective pensiveness, they would occasionally lament that our life is so fleeting, that its course is often unpredictable, and that, inevitably, so many foolish things happen to us; but, still, they would not throw up their hands in despair nor stick out their tongues at the world nor just hide in a corner.

2. *To Act With Hope*

Indeed, they would not. They would not resign from the world because of “the foolish things that are always happening to us” nor would they stick out their tongues at it, declaring it to be intrinsically absurd, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Since all of their undertakings blow up in their faces, end up by just collapsing into nothing, the Helmites could not be blamed if they react in conformity with Kant’s theory of laughter or Sartre’s philosophy of Existentialism.

According to Kant, laughter is occasioned by the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing. Is not this the invariable outcome of all of the Helmite undertakings, almost as if it were the “entelechy,” the “immanent destiny” of these undertakings? The Helmites talk and plan for seven days and seven nights, and then set to work carrying out their plan, and when it is done and they are about to rejoice in its consummation and to reap their reward, there is the sudden collapse of their effort and their expectation into dust and wind, into nothing. Defeat for the Helmites is always temporary; it is not really a defeat for a misadventure. They might laugh at it, but they cannot spare the time for it, nor are they accustomed, by tradition and upbringing, to let themselves go in laughter. Without hesitation and without trepidation they are at it again, holding conclave for seven days and seven nights, in preparation for a renewed assault upon a recalcitrant world in which “foolish things are always happening to us.”

Nor are they prone to behave as though they were disciples of Jean-Paul Sartre, recognizing with him that the world is, by definition — nay, by actuality, by the irrefutable evidence of experience — absurd, tragically absurd. Sartre would, of course, maintain that there is no evading the world and its coercions, somber and ludicrous as they may be, nor that there is dignity in trying to escape, and that our only option is *to act* — but, alas, “to act without hope.” To laugh for its own sweet sake, the Helmites would have neither the time nor could they create the mood for it; to act without hope, they would have no heart for it. The Helmites

would not cavil at the claim of the Existentialist that a man's act is his portrait, that the act is the path to freedom. But they would lack the ingenuity of mind or the sweep of imagination to fathom the possibility of an act without hope.

If the act is a portrait, then the act without hope would strike the Helmites as a portrait without a frame. The portrait is the work of art, and the frame is regarded as instrumental to it. Well, instrumental it may be, but not incidental or trivial. The frame is the boundary between the specific and organized space of the portrait and the general and endless space *out there*, beyond the portrait. Without the frame, the space of the portrait merges into the space of the world; it blends into the space of the world, like a tree in a forest or a star in the sky. Without hope, the act is hurled at the world, like a stone thrown into the air by an angry or frightened or merely playful lad; without hope there is no differentiation between our own foolishness, or our own tiny bit of wisdom and goodness, and the world *out there* in which "foolish things are always happening to us," in which, long before the Existentialist, the folk-poet, Robert Burns, could cry out that "the best laid plans of mice and men oft go awry."

To this, too, the Helmites, in their innocence or naiveté, might reply: ah, but mice make no plans and do not hope, and men do; and, in the same breath, they might add, forestalling and counterbalancing the Existentialist: we are not condemned to freedom but betrothed to it; with hope we choose to act, and in our capacity and will to hope, and to illumine our act with hope, therein lies our freedom.

3. *Foolishness as Irony*

The Helmites are always on the go, and they "act with hope." Their confidence is indomitable; nothing fazes them. They work with zeal, with persistence, and with joy in their hearts and hands. Others would be eager to circumvent their tasks as sordid drudgery — building a watermill on the topmost mountain peak or dragging logs up the mountain so as to roll them down again. But for the Helmites it is a song, a spree, a choral dance. The Helmites are remote from erudition, and they have probably at best only a nodding acquaintance with the Talmud. But the Midrash, with its exposition and exhortation, in the form of story and parable, would not be unfamiliar to them. Most likely they had read or heard of the particular Midrash which reinterprets the parable of the curse of work into a blessing.

According to Genesis, one of the punishments meted out to Adam for eating from the tree of knowledge was that henceforth he and his progeny were to eat bread with the sweat of their brows. This verdict should have dismayed Adam, but the Midrash has it that, instead of being dismayed, he rejoiced, in some such fashion as this:

Dear God, this is the best news yet in my brief career on this earth, and it is

music to my ears; now I am no longer a drone, a parasite, a playboy living off the fat of the land. Now I and my wife and my children-to-be shall strike roots in this earth that you have given us and shall have a share in its growth and fruition. Now we have a job to do and a destiny to fulfill.

When Adam spoke these words of humility and dignity, he spoke for all of us, but especially for Helm, so that Helm might act with hope and also with gladness.

Why? Well, for one thing, they work in behalf of the common good; this, too, is incontestable. Neither profit nor power is the animating motive, but the welfare and glory of Helm, of the total congregation of men and women. But how about the urge to pile up possessions for one's self? And what better incentive is there to get the wheels of industry moving and the distribution and exchange of commodities to flow smoothly? And how about the faith of Adam Smith that out of the enlightened self-interest of each will emerge the common good of all, redounding to everybody's benefit?

The poor Helmites, doubly poor — both in worldly possessions and in what astute men call the practical sense — would probably miss the point of the question and would respond with some *non sequitur*. Indeed, an incident that befell them — one among the foolish things that are always happening to them — will bear this out. The Helmites had taken their coats off one morning as they were preparing to push the watermill aside. In the evening they went to look for them and there were no coats, not a sign of them, as if they had just vanished into the air. When the visiting miller suggested that maybe someone stole them, the Helmites were not only incredulous, but amused and astounded by the sheer stupidity of such a remark, as if it emanated from someone out of this world. "Listen to the fool. Who would need so many coats? No one can need so many coats. No one can wear more than one."

Are the Helmites guilty of a *reductio ad absurdum*, or is it the world that is out of step? Out of step — with what and with whom? Let the moralists and theologians argue and speculate, but for the Helmites there is no mystery here. "No one can wear more than one coat," and, if that is true, its corollary is also true, that each person should have his coat to wear, and what is there to quibble about? It is as plain as the nose on your face, is it not? And if it is not plain, well, even the Helmites might for once be tempted to quote from the ancient sources. Did not Isaiah have much the same idea? "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field . . ." (5:8) And did not Amos inveigh against those "that oppress the poor, that crush the needy . . ." (4:1). Would it be too comical if, in the end, it turned out that the Helmites were not simpletons at all, except in the "practical" sense, but were, rather, the unspoiled children of God choosing to forget much so as to remember precisely this — that we are all children of God. The distance between the Prophets and the Helmites is vast, but a thread, barely visible, extends from the Prophets to the Helm-

ites: in their diverse styles, they are wielders of irony — of any irony directed against the idolatries of the world.

4. *In Quest of Justice*

The idolatries of the world do invade Helm, and the visiting miller is the mediating agent between Helm and the world with its idolatries. Not that the miller is the villain and wishes to corrupt Helm. He is the agent and not the cause. He represents the world *out there* and its sober and prudential wisdom, particularly as incarnate in what is summed up in the single word *business*. Not that business, either, is the culprit. It is the exemplar, par excellence, of a type of civilization, of a manner of living, and it is also a concept of man's nature and doctrine of human relationship.

Before business came to Helm — in the days where they were building watermills on mountain tops and dragging logs up a hill — the people were neither rich nor poor, and were not scheming how to elude the Biblical injunction "in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread" and to substitute for it the version that is legitimized *out there* in the world, "thou shalt eat bread with the sweat of thy neighbor's brow." Before business spread to Helm, the people toiled and sweated together, and *neighbor* was someone to love and work with and not to step upon and take advantage of, and each was to have a coat and a morsel of bread. But business did infiltrate Helm, and then envy and deceit blossomed, and there were poor and rich, with the gap between them increasing almost daily.

Now the Helmites were up against a challenge and a problem beyond their capacity to solve on their own. Well, since it was the world out there that conferred the boon of business upon them, was it not plausible to assume that it would also show them how to cope with this problem of justice, how to bolster business with justice, how to drain from it the poison of evil. And, so, the Helmites embarked upon their supreme misadventure; they sent forth a delegation to buy at any price this rare and precious commodity that is labelled justice. The delegation went forth into the world, into the big city, Warsaw, in quest of justice; it looked in every nook and cranny, it searched far and wide, and finally its efforts were rewarded as it found a couple of scoundrels who sold them a whole barrellful of justice for the two thousand gold pieces that they had been able to scrape together with the sweat of their brows.

The delegation sallied forth into the world with a feeling of anxiety modulated by hope, but their journey back was unclouded by wavering or dread, for had they not achieved the noblest of aims? Had they not succeeded in their commission to buy justice, a whole barrellful of it? On arriving in Helm, the delegation infected all of the community with their spirit of triumph, and it was in a mood of high festivity that the cover was lifted so that the Helmites might see what the vaunted justice of the world looked like. Robert Browning had written, "A man's reach should exceed

his grasp or what's a heaven for?", and had the Helmites been poets or philosophers, they would have paraphrased it thus, "A man's hope should transcend his act, or what's a dream for?" But even the Helmites were struck with horror when the barrellful of justice turned out to be a barrellful of rotten fish. And as its foul odor assailed their nostrils, something cracked in their hearts, too — the blow was too severe for the hope in their hearts and they snapped. It was then that Gimpel, the beneficiary of business in Helm, cried out, with no chance of contradiction from the victims of business in Helm, "Aye, the justice of the world smells bad! . . . Take heed, O ye Helmites who complain of the justice in Helm, that's the kind of justice you have in the rest of the world!"

5. *Fraud and Victory*

The picture is not as drab as it appears at first glance, nor as simple. The barrellful of justice is not necessarily representative of the world *out there*, beyond the gates of Helm; and it was sold to the Helmites, put over on them as a malicious trick, a sort of sleight-of-hand, by a pair of rogues. There were many in the city who were quite as eager as the Helmites to come face-to-face with justice, who were in search of it and longing for it. The world out there is complex and it abounds in deeds of justice and injustice — both in varying degrees. It might be better, as Tolstoy proposed, to be occasionally the victim of deception than to be always suspicious, but this, too, must be within the bounds of reason. *Caveat emptor* — let the buyer beware — is an immoral principle as a guide-post for society, but none can be wholly absolved from the obligation to exercise caution, to look at the world with intelligent eyes.

That the anecdote is a parable, just as are the stories of Franz Kafka, goes without saying. Like every good parable, this one, too, may have a plurality of meanings, and yet it would be fatuous to try to apply the "moral" of the anecdote to events in our own world; one can fall only too easily into a superficially didactic and pedestrian strain. Yet how can one avoid thinking, for instance, of the generations of self-sacrificing idealists who struggled in the Russia of the Czars against tyranny and oppression and for the rights of the people, and got for it a barrellful of dictatorship and oppression as foul and worse — as any of the Czars? Or how can one avoid thinking of the Jews of Germany who embraced the Emancipation with open arms and a full heart and gave up so much for it, and then got for themselves and for the Jews of Europe a barrellful of Treblinka and Majdanek: that is, a barrellful of inferno.

The Helmites are no simpletons, and the tale is a parable. The Hasidic disciples of Shneur Zalman looked upon his release from prison as a miracle, and when challenged by the sceptic who thought a bribe would be a better explanation, retorted, "But there must be a natural explanation, must there not?"

Here we note the deep-rooted conviction that justice must prevail, that justice is a feature of reality, that the ideal cannot be completely cut off from the actual. With the Helmites it was not so much the reverse — the persuasion, following their disappointment, that corruption is intrinsic to reality and that justice is a mirage; it was, most likely, the perception that caution and care cannot be thrown to the winds, that both justice and corruption are categories within reality.

But this was not the initial reaction of the Helmites: At first, the pendulum swung from the extreme of naive credulity to the extreme of utter abandonment of value, as voiced by the young cobbler lad, speaking for the poor of the town: “Poor people of Helm, listen to me; if there is no justice in Helm, and even the justice of the world has been spoiled, then it doesn’t matter what we do. We can do whatever we want.” This was the first reaction — *let din v’let dayan*: there is neither law nor judge — but not the final one; it was not the way of Helm, not the way of a people that was nurtured on the teachings of the Torah, on the voluntary acceptance of law as a discipline in conduct and an experiment in holiness. And so it happened that when the cobbler lad was done shouting: “Let’s break into the shops and take whatever we need,” that the poor people of Helm echoed him in chorus: “We’ll take the finest clothes . . . and the choicest meat for the Sabbath,” and they quickly added: “And in the Synagogue let’s take the pews by the East Wall. Let the rich stand behind the pulpit near the stove and alongside the wash basin.”

But how long can you cling to the notion that there is neither law nor judge, that all is permitted and nothing is true, as Nietzsche would have it: “*Nichts ist wahr, alles ist erlaubt*,” when your hunger is for the choicest meats for the Sabbath and your dream is of a pew in the Synagogue on the East Wall that is, in the direction of Jerusalem, the holy city; and, so, after seven days and seven nights, a solution is somehow worked out between the rich and the poor. It is “a brilliant compromise,” a solution that is at once a fraud (from the standpoint of the actual) and a victory (from the standpoint of the ideal.)

After seven days and seven nights, the Helmites arrive at this compromise: “From this day on whenever an ox is slaughtered, let the entire animal consist only of the choicest parts. . . . Let all parts be all alike . . . Likewise let it be known to all that the entire Synagogue is the East Wall and center pews. . . . Likewise, let there be no distinction between satin and gingham, silk and cotton. Let all stuffs be alike. . . . But since it happens that the rich may be foolish enough to wish to pay more in order to sit nowhere else but at the *former* East Wall; likewise, since they may desire to pay more for the *former* breast and flank meats, and for *former* silks and velvets and wools — then let them be welcome to their foolishness.” And, so, the Helmites decide that henceforth all would be equal in possession and status, but, as in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, some would be more equal. With this task accomplished, the Helmites resume their

rounds of daily motions, the rhythm of their normal functions, with renewed vigor and eagerness.

Of course this is a fraud. The state of affairs remains as it was. East is East and West is West, soup with potatoes is one thing and soup with chicken is another thing. The poor are poor and the rich are rich. It is a fraud perpetrated upon the poor of Helm and, in one respect, it is an especially dangerous fraud, because it is accompanied by the illusion that all is now right, that all wrongs have been redressed and all perfidies have been erased.

But it is also a victory, a gesture of courtesy, as it were, to the ideal. It is, at least, an admission that there have been wrongs and that there will continue to be wrongs, that the world is as yet unredeemed. The Helmites, both the rich and the poor, by virtue of this very compromise, manifest a non-Helgelian attitude toward the world, rejecting the implication that the real is already rational, that there is no disparity between the ideal and the actual — "*Was vernünftig ist, das ist, was ist, das vernünftig ist.*" The Helmites are Jews and for them the Messianic Age is still in the future and, in the pithy phrase of Ernest Renan, with other Jews they share "a thirst for the future." For the Helmites there could be no equating of the real with the rational; at most, they could only support the claim that the beginning of the redemption has been inaugurated, *as'halta d'geulah*, but not that it has been achieved in full. And their compromise, insofar as it acknowledges, at least in principle, the equality of all, is superior to the type of compromise which fixes the stratification of humanity in a hierarchical ladder, and this very compromise *is*, therefore, the beginning of the redemption, the confession and avowal that all are *b'zelem elohim*, in the image of God.

Such stratification there is in Plato's *Republic* (though, at birth, all children have presumably the same chance and are to be classified in the educational process according to their aptitudes and abilities). But the Helmites do not cope with the problem of justice in the manner of Plato's myth, with its division of society into three classes — gold, silver, bronze. Nor does the Helmite solution resemble the caste-system of India with its freezing of humanity, as if by divine edict, into sharply segregated groups, without even the initial fluidity that prevails in the *Republic*.

If anything, the Helmite compromise is closer to the American myth — "all men are created equal" and "all men are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This, too, was at once a fraud and a victory. At the time when it was proclaimed there was no right to life and liberty for the black man in America, and there was no equality for the women of America, nor, indeed, for people who worked with the sweat of their brows and had no property. But it was a victory, too, far more than a gesture of courtesy to the ideal; it, too, was a sort of admission that the Kingdom has not yet been built, that America was the beginning but not the fulfillment of redemption, that the Declaration and the Constitution

(with the Bill of Rights) were the path to justice but not yet the total enactment of justice.

6. *Justice – Hellenic and Hebraic*

And it is here that the heart of the matter lies — the Helmite concept of justice, despite circumvention and trickery and evasion, is yet essentially Hebraic, as contrasted, say, with the Hellenic. For the Hellenic philosophers justice was grounded in the notion of limits and boundaries. Both the order of nature and the order of society were in order because all of their parts were marked off by clear boundaries, and to transgress these limits and borders was the reversal of justice, its gravest violation. In Plato's *Republic*, injustice was to step out of one's assigned class, to reach out beyond it. In Aristotle, the doctrine of the mean was synonymous with the idea of limits: virtue lies in not exceeding the limits of moderation, in avoiding the two extremes of excess and deficiency.

In contrast to the Hellenic concept, the Hebraic view is predicated upon the belief that whatever boundaries there may be between man and man are transient and incidental, that we are all the children of God, that "you are a holy people unto Me and a kingdom of priests." Its beginning is also its apex. In the beginning there were Adam and Eve, with Adam as generic man and Eve as the source of symbol of life; Adam is earth — *adamah* — and the midrashic legend has it that, before creating Adam, God gathered particles of dust from all the corners of the earth, so that no place and no person might claim racial and territorial superiority. But here is also the pinnacle, the supreme point attained in the gospel of human equality: man is in the image of God. This is his ineffaceable dignity and none can deprive him of it, and this is his birthright and heritage always and everywhere, irreducible and inalienable. Little wonder, then, that the sage and teacher, the *tanna*, Ben Azzai, held this to be an even higher principle than the imperative "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," indeed, as the only adequate and sufficient warrant for the act of love. Its consummation is to be found in Jeremiah 22:16: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? Saith the Lord." Justice is the holy of holies; it is clear in both Jeremiah and Isaiah that justice is the content of holiness, and that holiness is the interior quality of justice.

8. *The Universality of Helm*

The Helmite stories stand on their own feet as an expression of the Comic Spirit, of the love of fun and frolic, of hilarity without hostility. But the mode of Jewish humor is irony, and the Helmite stories are replete with fun and irony, and irony aimed at themselves and at the world. Indeed, the irony is at times so penetrating, so revealing, so deftly focused upon the very core of our idolatries, of the false gods whom we serve so

diligently, that if it were not for the fun in it — the surprise of contrast, the sudden reversal of the expected, the apparent exaggeration with its grotesquerie — it would be hard to bear. The contrast and the reversal of the expected stir us as they do because somewhere in our minds and hearts there is the rational and ethical standard against which we appraise the events and appreciate the grotesquerie in them.

After we have smiled and laughed, it dawns upon us that the contrast and exaggeration are not only in the stories but *out there* in the world of our experience where foolish things happen to us and where we, in our finitude and with our pretenses, are not seldom the architects of the foolish things that always happen to us. The Helmites drag the logs to the top of the mountain only to roll them down again, we are regaled by it and derive fun from it. The Helmites are simpletons, else they, too, would discern the silliness of it, the silliness and the sinfulness of immense toil in vain. But Sisyphus was no simpleton; he excelled in craftiness. Yet, like the Helmites, he also pushed his stone to the top of the steep hill, only to see it roll down again. Ah, but the Helmites had a choice and Sisyphus did not; the Helmites did it out of ignorance or stupidity, where Sisyphus was compelled to engage in this tragi-comedy in spite of his craftiness.

Did the Helmites — do we — really have a choice in the sense that the results are always commensurate with our efforts? That there is a correspondence between effort and success? For Albert Camus the myth of Sisyphus is the symbol of our common lot, of our tragi-comic predicament in a universe which is fundamentally irrational or at least in which there is no harmony between our ideals or values and objective reality. Whether we be simpletons like the Helmites or shrewd like Sisyphus, this is our common lot, and there are no loop-holes. How, then, are we to transcend our lot, if we cannot escape it? For Camus it is to do what we must do, but to do it with scorn and contempt for the forces or agents that condemn us to the bondage and forlornness of Sisyphus. Sartre urges us to act, but to act without hope; Camus exhorts us to act, but to act with Promethean scorn and courage. This is the gospel of the absurd: there is no reconciliation between the “logic” of our acts and the “logic” (or lack of logic) of reality. This is the ultimate incongruity — the universe as seen, not under Spinoza’s aspect of eternity, but under the Existentialist’s aspect of the absurd. If there is irony in Sartre, it dissolves in despair; if there is irony in Camus, it is absorbed in a proud indignation. There is neither despair nor rage in the irony of the Helmites. With Goethe they would be prone to say: “In the beginning was the deed.” But the deed has gone astray. Why? If you will, because of our finitude and foolishness, because the world is not easy to manage, but also because of our wilfulness and capriciousness and myopia in handling the world.

In explicating their irony, the Helmites might forget for a moment that they are simpletons and note that the Sisyphus of America, for example, is troubled because his task might be mitigated too much too

soon. The Helmites would not grasp — even after seven times seven days and nights — the portent of such a term as “automation,” but if they could, then it would be their turn to laugh on hearing about the logs that they dragged up to the top of the hill only to roll them down again. They would laugh and perhaps catch more than a glimpse of the irony in it.

The irony of the Helmites, of the folk who dreamed up the stories of Helm, is not mean and malicious, nor is it self-righteous. It would seem that the Helmites set themselves over against the world. Like George Bernard Shaw, in the preface to *Methuselah*, the Helmites ascribe lunacy to the world. In the preface to that play, Shaw writes that if there are living beings on other planets, then the earth must be their insane asylum. Similarly, the Helmites refute all “preposterous” complaints and arguments with the rhetorical and definitive question: “Are you crazy? Are you from Shedlitz?” And Shedlitz, for the Helmites, is the gate to the world *out there*. But, then, there is the amazement of Pinya, the Helmite philosopher, as he exclaims: “Lo and behold, the whole world is like Helm.” And, finally, there is the closing admonition . . . “And so, dear reader, if you discover a bit of the Helmite in yourself, you’ll know the reason why.” This is gently disarming. If you think you’re making fun of the Helmites, well, have as much fun as you like, but, remember, Helm is universal, it is everywhere, and no matter where you reside, you are also a citizen of Helm. But it is also an alarm-clock to wake up the Helmites, or their inventors, to spur them to take their irony in the spirit of irony, seriously but not solemnly, at least not too solemnly, not to delude themselves into the belief that it does not relate to them.

The stories of Helm are parables, like the parables of Kafka, only their authorship is anonymous, they belong to the people. Despite their association with a specific locale and their connection with an identifiable community, or, indeed, because of it, there is a universal note in them. The Helmites had roots, Helm was their home, and they were chary of Shedlitz, of Warsaw, of the world. Yet, somehow, they had wings, too. Or was it that when they released the feathers from the sacks they had brought and sent them off to Helm by just dispersing them in the air (to save transportation expenses), the feathers were blown by the winds in all directions, infecting the world with the “foolishness” of Helm?

Evolving Relations Between Israel and the Third World

SUSAN AURELIA GITELSON

ISRAEL AND THE THIRD WORLD HAVE GONE through a cycle of changing relations. First came embryonic explorations of contacts after Israel and many of the developing countries had attained their independence and were trying to establish friendships outside of their traditional colonial patterns. New opportunities arose in particular after the Sinai Campaign of 1956. Subsequently, relations expanded, especially in diplomatic and economic affairs, buoyed by Israel's euphoric upsurge that was created by the Six Day War of 1967. Underlying problems, however, became evident through the shock of the Yom Kippur War of 1973, particularly the break in diplomatic relations with Israel by most of the black African states. Following these events, Israel's political activities in Africa declined, since it had diplomatic relations with only three states, but it did increase its trade. Emphasis shifted to Latin America, while Israel maintained the same level in Asia. Recently, the new opportunities created by the great change in Israeli — Egyptian relations may have stimulated a renewed cycle of closer and more dynamic relations between Israel and the Third World. This article will analyze Israel as a developing country, trace the major periods of Israel's relations with the Third World, and consider possibilities for the future.

The "Third World" is a sweeping term used to simplify a discussion of the diverse countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It includes states with ancient civilizations, such as India and Ethiopia, and new creations, such as Guyana and Cape Verde. Politically, the groupings have broadened from the Asian bloc at the UN, to the Afro-Asia Group, to the inclusion of the Latin American countries. For the most part, the latter have had quite different histories as they gained their independence in the nineteenth century and were dominated first by Europe and then by the United States. From the Jewish viewpoint, as well, there are important contrasts between the majority of countries, which lack any Jewish populations, and the Latin American states and a scattering of other Asian and African countries that do have Jewish communities. While it is important to bear these diversities in mind, it is possible to discern general patterns in

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Israel's relations with the Third World.¹*Israel as a Developing Country*

Israel, like most countries in the Third World, emerged from alien rule to independence. It achieved statehood as part of the Asian wave following the Second World War. The African states joined the trend beginning in the late fifties. To bring meaning to its fragile independence, each Asian and African country has had to transform itself from within and to deal with pressure from without. Each new state has tried to maintain its security, though few at such a high cost as Israel, and to improve its relative power position both through its own activities and, where possible, through joint efforts with other small and middle-sized powers. The goals of each state also include development — not only economic growth, but the whole concomitant process of modernization in ideas and institutions. Israel, in addition, out of its historical attachment to the Bible and its land and influenced by the memory of persecution and the Holocaust, felt that it had a mission to be a “light unto the nations.” Moreover, it was one of the first recipients of aid to feel that it also wished to give to others.

The fact that the establishment of the State of Israel was the result of both the unique experience of the Jewish people and a world-wide trend has helped to create the underlying tensions in Israel's identity — the impact of the history of the Jewish people in the West and the sharing of many characteristics and challenges of the Third World. This is evident in Israel's foreign policy, where Israel, in its fledgling period, was very much tied to the superpowers. Most of the other postcolonial states retained their umbilical cords to their metropolises, but Great Britain was too concerned with the Arabs to sustain Israel and, thus, came to be replaced, first by the United States and the USSR, and later by just the United States. Israel was one of the first countries to try to be nonaligned between the superpowers, but its hostile neighbors forced its exclusion from the Nonaligned Movement founded by other states in similar circumstances. Nonetheless, Israel followed the optimum strategy for a small state in diversifying its ties to include as many Third World countries as possible. New opportunities arose, especially after the Sinai Campaign, to leapfrog over hostile neighbors and to find new friends. This led to Israel's first real assertion of itself on the world scene. But, after the Six Day War, and especially after the Yom Kippur War, the changed circumstances reduced the connections with the Third World, although they did not obliterate them entirely, and made Israel again dependent mainly on the West.

The three decades since independence have also changed the nature of Israeli society internally, altering the balance from traits similar to

1. See Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson, *Israel in the Third World* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1976).

patterns in the Third World to those more closely resembling trends in the Western, industrialized countries. Demographically, however, Israel has been moving closer to the Third World as the source of population has shifted from Eastern Europe to the Middle East and North Africa. At the same time, Israel has become more Westernized and industrialized in many sectors and has achieved great sophistication in the electronic and other science-based industries, through its own efforts and through the importation of skills and capital from the West. It has also been undergoing the internal transformations characteristic of modernization. In this process, it has become a leader in the development of efficient small-scale agriculture and has evolved techniques in such areas as irrigation, desalination and semi-arid development, which, in turn, have been useful for many Third World countries. Israel's emphasis on agriculture has offered a vital understanding of the best way to move Third World countries forward — to work with the rural population toward a balanced, healthy society.

These dynamic, historical circumstances and the evolving search for identity both in Israel and the Third World help to explain the affinities and tensions that exist. Concurrently, the pervasive Middle East conflict has led to intense competition with the Arab states for Third World support and for votes in international forums, where the Arabs have the advantage of greater numbers and influence. The Arabs have stressed their own membership in the Third World, as well as their financial means to assist development, although they have often competed among themselves and with African countries for leadership, and have not always dispensed their funds generously enough, at least not from the viewpoint of the developing countries.

Consequently, Israel has experienced serious difficulties in international relations. It was denied membership in the Afro-Asian Group and the Nonaligned Movement. Nonetheless, it has been a Permanent Observer of the Organization of American States (OAS). At the UN, its problems have increased along with the growing membership of the Arab League. When countries have lobbied for membership and for the chairmanship of important committees, as well as for political support on substantive issues, they have needed the greatest number of votes, and those the Arabs could more readily supply than could Israel. The trend to critical resolutions in the UN intensified, moreover, after the Six Day War because of the sensitivity of new states to questions of territorial integrity. In addition, the Arabs have portrayed themselves as the underdog in order to elicit sympathy and have identified the PLO with other Third World liberation movements. They have generally been able to count on Moslem states, such as Afghanistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan. At the same time, they have gained support from radical and pro-Communist states, like Cuba.

The Early Years

Israel's concern with the Third World grew and flourished in the 1950s as a reaction to its difficulties with the Major Powers and in the hope of overcoming the isolation imposed by its hostile neighbors through their boycotts and propaganda. From 1949 to 1956 Israel had interacted mainly with the US, USSR, Great Britain and France. Although it had hoped to be nonaligned, it was difficult to maintain such a policy when the Russians began to give more and more support to the Arabs at Israel's expense. There were few contacts with Asia and Africa, but Latin America offered great support in the UN, especially for the partition resolution of November 29, 1947. Israel already had consular representation in a number of Latin American countries, particularly Argentina and Mexico, based on its concern for the Jewish communities there.

The Sinai Campaign period led to enormous changes in Israel's diplomatic profile. In 1957 it had only seven embassies in the entire world, — in Europe, North America and Argentina. By 1964, Israel had representatives in 87 countries, 75 at the ambassadorial level. Only the US, Great Britain and France had more extensive diplomatic networks.

Israel did make some attempts in Asia during the early period, since many of the other states, like Burma, India and Pakistan, had achieved their independence from Great Britain at the same time, but Israel was quite ambivalent about considering itself an Asian power. Its closest ties and most vivid historical memories were in Europe. Moreover, most Asians had little direct knowledge of the Judeo-Christian tradition. For them, Zionism appeared to be a "European" ideology and, therefore, colonialist, even though it had many parallels with Third World aspirations for self-determination. In 1950, Israel recognized Communist China, but did not establish diplomatic relations at the time for fear of offending the United States. India has always had people sympathetic to Israel, as well as some indigenous Jewish communal groups, but it has never established full diplomatic relations with Israel, although it has permitted the setting up of a consulate in Bombay (but not in the capital, New Delhi). The Indian Government has been concerned about pressures from its Moslem population, as well as about Arab support in international forums where sensitive issues, such as its conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir, have been prominent. Indian President Jawaharlal Nehru also wanted to safeguard his Third World leadership position, together with Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia. Moslem countries, such as Pakistan, Indonesia and Afghanistan, have never been willing to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

Israel's key to Asia was provided by Burma when it established diplomatic relations in 1953 and facilitated meetings between Israelis and people from other developing countries. Nonetheless, as Israel learned in

its dealing with the Third World, good bilateral relations with other states could never safeguard its position in international forums, where the Arabs always had greater representation.

The great shock came at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955. The Arabs managed to have Israel excluded, despite its good relations with Burma and India. Too late, Israel realized that it had not done enough to consolidate its position in Asia. By the time Israel indicated its desire for closer ties there, most countries were unwilling to reciprocate. In particular, Israel might have established relations with China at an earlier period, but once China found acceptance at Bandung, it was no longer interested in Israel.

After the Sinai Campaign, Israel begun seriously to rethink its position, especially as the French and British had made such a poor showing. That war had succeeded in opening the Gulf of Eilat to shipping just as Israel was producing more goods for export. Meanwhile, Israel was more concerned than ever to overcome its isolation. The best way to do so would be through relations with the "Second Tier" of countries beyond the hostile Arab ring, including Iran, Turkey and the newly emerging black African states. Israel expected to be able to find there other governments which shared its ideology of pragmatic socialism. At the same time, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, in particular, felt that Israel had a humanitarian and messianic task to be a "light unto the nations." If Israel could offer useful assistance, it would thereby alleviate its own psychological burden of being dependent upon the West and, at the same time, enhance its image in the United States and elsewhere for its practically acquired knowledge about Third World countries.

Israel's Achievements in Africa and Elsewhere

Israel established an extensive network of relations with the developing countries, especially in Africa. This outreach occurred just as the black African states were gaining their independence and searching for friends, and it developed into a broad and diverse program. Until 1957, only Ethiopia and Liberia had been independent, but in that year Kwame Nkrumah led the Gold Coast into independence as "Ghana" and set the trend for other countries south of the Sahara. Like Israel in 1948, Ghana needed legitimacy and assistance. This was just what Israel could provide a decade after its own independence. Israel had made contacts with the Ghanaians even before their independence through the trade unions and the Zim line, as well as by having a consul in Accra. When Ghana finally did achieve statehood, Nkrumah was able to turn to the Israeli ambassador, Ehud Avriel, for practical advice about development. Often Israel was the most expeditious source of technical assistance for irrigation, training, and other requirements. This set the pattern for Israel's subsequent relations with other black African states which, for the most part, attained their independence in 1960 and thereafter.

Israel had a unique impact because it was one of the first states to recognize the black African countries. Moreover, its aid was perceived as an instrument for the development countries to find new sources outside of the former colonial powers, and its technical assistance was appropriate to countries whose means were limited and who were desirous of small-scale methods. In addition, Israel offered a model for national service groups, based on *Nahal*, and for both producer and marketing cooperatives. Agricultural experts, educators, doctors and many other Israelis were effective and made a greater impact than their numbers might have suggested because they were willing to work with their hands, whereas many ex-colonial experts were not, and to improvise and try to adapt techniques to local circumstances. At the same time, Israel began to establish training programs at home: the Afro-Asia Institute for Labour Studies and Cooperation in Tel Aviv, the Mt. Carmel International Training Center for Community Service in Haifa, the Regional Development Institute in Rehovot, and a medical training program at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In addition, conferences on science and technology were held biannually at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot.

Israel also had unusual importance in the early days because Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Golda Meir gave high priority to black Africa. Her meeting in Accra, in 1958, with the leaders of the major French colonies that were soon to become independent, made a deep impression on the Africans, many of whom subsequently became heads of state. The result was unusual personal cordiality.

All might have been well if Israel could have relied on its relations with individual states. From the beginning, however, it was necessary to contend with Arab pressures at African meetings, since leading Arab States, such as Egypt and Algeria, are on the African continent.

When, in 1961, at the Casablanca meeting of radical states, Nkrumah joined Nasser in condemning Israel, Israel was shocked. As was to happen many times subsequently, the African leader tried to extend some comfort by saying that resolutions at such gatherings did not mean anything. Still, it was unpleasant to be condemned at UN and Third World meetings, and Israel soon gave up its expectations that it might gather much support for its position in international organizations. It became evident that the best it could hope for, in most instances, was for the black African states to abstain or to be absent.

Successes and Setbacks, 1967-1973

After the Six Day War of 1967, Israel's economy boomed and its self-confidence expanded. The country was proud of itself for its extensive contacts in black Africa and elsewhere. Technical assistance programs grew. At times, however, the populace gave too much credence to the press image of Israel as a "Big Power" in Africa. Trade increased greatly,

especially with the closure of the Suez Canal and the general expansion of Israel's factories and exports.

But few people in Israel, with the exception of some academics and diplomats, gave much attention to the growing problems in the relations with Africa and the rest of the Third World. Israel no longer stood out as being almost unique. Many middle powers, like Canada, the Scandinavian countries, West Germany and Japan, had begun to expand their aid to the developing countries. Generally, they had more capital to offer, in the form of loans and grants, than Israel did, while they could also provide useful technical assistance. Moreover, they were not embroiled in a political contest that tested the loyalties of those receiving the aid.

At the same time, the Arabs were trying to politicize their aid in order to gain support from Islamic countries. Attacking Israel was probably the best way to secure it. Another form of adherence to the Arab cause came from radical individuals, groups and, finally, governments which took up the cause of the PLO. The radicals also used Israel as a whipping boy out of frustration with setbacks in their development, especially the drought in the Sahel in the late sixties and early seventies. It has always been easier to excoriate a smaller country than to take on major suppliers of military and economic assistance, like France, Great Britain or the United States. At the same time, breaking relations with a small country identified with the West could attract more aid from the Soviet Union and China.

In 1972 and 1973, these combined economic and political causes led certain individual black African countries, such as Uganda, Chad, Mali, Congo (Brazzaville), and Niger, to sever diplomatic relations on an individual basis with Israel. They were following Guinea, which had broken diplomatic relations in 1967 in response to the war, and Sri Lanka (Ceylon), which had suspended ties in 1970 in response to an internal pro-Arab minority. In Latin America, opposition to Israel and Jews came from both radical groups and neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic elements.

The Massive Break in Diplomatic Relations in 1973 and Arab Ascendancy

The Yom Kippur War acted as a catalyst to intensify Israel's isolation on the diplomatic scene. The Arabs had several main advantages: oil and money, which could be dangled along with the promises of massive aid, and new power and influence in international politics because of the leverage of the oil producers on the international financial structure.

At the Nonaligned meeting in Algiers in September 1973, the Arabs were prominent both in pressing for a New International Economic Order to benefit the developing countries and in coordinating their efforts for the coming attack on Israel. At the UN General Assembly in early October of that year, President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire proclaimed that if he had to choose between a brother and a friend, he would choose the brother, and then broke diplomatic relations with Israel. Cuba

did likewise. More states ruptured relations when Israel had recovered and assumed the offensive after the Yom Kippur War broke out. When Israel crossed the Suez Canal into Egypt, the Administrative Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Nzo Ekwangaki, issued an appeal to all OAU members to break relations since Israel had occupied the territory of a member state. Many African states followed through. Some among them, such as Nigeria and Tanzania, which had tried to maintain a nonaligned policy in the Middle East, joined in after more than a majority of states had broken relations with Israel, an event unprecedented in OAU history. Even those countries which had been friendliest to Israel, such as the Ivory Coast, Liberia and Kenya, followed suit. By the end of 1973, there were diplomatic relations with only four African states: Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Mauritius. Then the latter also broke ties with Israel before it hosted an OAU summit in 1976. In Latin America, Guyana severed relations in 1974.

The Arabs appeared triumphant in 1973-74. Through the oil embargo and the rise in oil prices, they increased their bargaining power with the West and seemed to create serious fissures in the international financial system. At the same time, they looked like the heroes of the Third World because of their power over the industrialized countries, even though the poorest states were suffering most severely from the oil price hike. More important, however, was the solidarity of OPEC, which was able to bargain successfully with the West. Here was an inspiring example for other Third World countries, whose leaders wished to attain a New International Economic Order. Meanwhile, there was the tantalizing promise of Arab aid. In addition, the UN recognized the PLO and enhanced its international legitimacy. Concurrently, the attacks against Israel at the UN were growing more virulent, and the Arabs were able to secure almost complete majorities for the resolutions linking Zionism with *apartheid* in 1973 and 1974.

But although the Arabs may appear to be in the ascendant, they have also encountered difficulties. They have been unable to suspend or expel Israel from the UN, even if, in November 1975, they did secure passage of the Zionism-as-a-"form of racism"-resolution, with a vote of 72-35-32. Some countries, like Mexico, unexpectedly sided with the Arabs and immediately experienced a backlash from the Jewish community. Yet, despite the Arab victory, 17 black African states, or almost half their number, did not vote for the resolution: five opposed it and twelve abstained or were absent. Among the latter were some states which had received substantial Arab loans, including Ethiopia, Zaire and Zambia.²

The Arabs have increased their international prestige and influence through their oil wealth, but, as might have been expected, they have

2. Susan Aurelia Gitelson, "Unfulfilled Expectations: Israeli and Arab Aid as Political Instruments in Black African Voting Behavior," *Jewish Social Studies*, XXXVIII, 2 (Spring, 1976): 159-175.

disappointed many countries which had hoped to benefit from their largesse. They have been generous with their aid and have promised a greater proportion of their GNP than have the OECD countries, but most of the aid has been in the form of military assistance to the confrontation states against Israel or has benefitted other Moslem countries. This has left comparatively little for other Third World countries, although it has encouraged the heads of a number of states to convert to Islam (e.g., the deposed emperor Bokassa of the now Central African Republic and President Omar Bongo of Gabon).

The Arabs have also established a number of channels to aid Africa: the Special Arab Fund for Africa to help overcome the effects of the oil-price rise was worth \$200 million in 1977; the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) in Khartoum had \$231 million; and the Arab Fund for Technical Aid to Africa contained \$25 million. The actual loans dispersed, however, have been lower in value. The BADEA, for example, had agreed to finance 50 projects worth \$330 million through 1979. The Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have also been providing assistance on an individual basis.

At the Afro-Arab Summit Conference in Cairo in March, 1977, the Arabs made a great show of their generosity. Collectively they pledged \$1.45 billion to black Africa. Saudi Arabia came first with a promise of \$1 billion, including \$240 million for BADEA and \$80 million to the African Development Bank (ADB) in Abidjan, the Ivory Coast. Kuwait offered \$240 million; the United Arab Emirates, \$137 million; and Qatar, \$76 million, all in the course of the next five years.

Although the black African states were generally pleased with the Arab offers, these represented far less than the Tanzanian request at the outset of the meeting for \$2.2 billion. Furthermore, they resented the fact that the Arabs have given five times as much to the BADEA in Khartoum, where they retain control, as to the ADB in Abidjan, where the black African states themselves exert much greater influence.

The total Arab aid promised to black Africa by 1978 was \$3 billion, of which \$1 billion was being offered on a commercial basis. Nonetheless, the actual amounts pledged are negligible when compared to the problems caused by the rise in oil prices and the enormous and persisting needs for development assistance. In August, 1978, the President of BADEA, Dr. Chedly Ayari, reported that the Arabs had just set aside \$15 million for the special assistance fund established to help African countries that were having difficulties with their oil and other payments, but that that would be the last time they would do so.³ Finally, actual allocation of funds has been slow and often disappointing. The Arabs lack the administrative apparatus to organize their programs effectively. Moreover, the Arabs have tried to exact a political tradeoff. Dr. Ayari indicated that the Arab Bank would sever relations with any African state which restored diplo-

3. *The Middle East*, No. 46 (August, 1978): 95-96.

matic relations with Israel.⁴

Israel Carries On

Despite setbacks and difficulties, Israel retains relations with the Third World. The rupture in diplomatic ties has not prevented the continuation, and in some cases the expansion, of trade with black African countries, while contacts also go on through other channels, such as the labor unions. Israel's military skills are still admired, as when Israel swooped into Uganda in 1976 to rescue the hostages at Entebbe airport (even though the operation also appeared to the Africans as a form of foreign intervention, which they resented). Those countries which are apprehensive about Arab (and Soviet) expansion in the Red Sea and elsewhere in Africa share strategic concerns with Israel. For example, the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan has led to greater American efforts to find allies in the Persian Gulf areas, including Israel, Egypt, Kenya, Somalia and Oman.

The main difficulties impeding the resumption of diplomatic relations between the black African states and Israel include Arab and Soviet pressures, which can be mitigated only by progress in Middle East negotiations. Furthermore, there is continuing sensitivity on the issues of the territories and the Palestinians. The black Africans are also adamantly opposed to Israel's links with South Africa and have imposed special UN resolutions singling it out. Of course, this tactic is unfair because many other countries, like France, Great Britain, West Germany, Japan, and the US, have much more substantial ties with South Africa, while many Arab and black African states have also been trading with that country. Moreover, while Israel is opposed to *apartheid*, it is concerned with the security of the Jewish community in South Africa. Despite this situation, Israel remains, as always, a vulnerable target. Ironically, if the black African states had not broken with Israel, there would have been less likelihood of Israel having strengthened its ties with South Africa.

To compensate for its more constrained position in Africa, Israel has been expanding its ties with Latin America, while maintaining a stable level of interactions with Asia. It has broadened its technical assistance program so that now, of all OAS observers, Israel gives the most scholarships. It has also been expanding trade with various Latin American countries. In addition, most of the Latin American countries, including Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Uruguay, and Venezuela, continue to maintain their embassies in Jerusalem. The more important countries — Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, along with Peru, however — remain in Tel Aviv.

4. BBC, SWB, December 18, 1979, p. ME/W1062/A1/1.

Prospects for the Future

The prospects for Israel's future relations with the Third World will depend a great deal upon developments in the Middle East, Arab relations with Third World countries, the major powers, and Israel's own self-image, goals and efforts. New opportunities have arisen as a result of the series of events initiated by the visit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977, the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the Israel-Egypt Treaty of 1979.

The normalization of relations between Israel and Egypt, including diplomatic relations, trade and technical assistance, can remove obstacles and interference with cooperative efforts between Israel and the Third World. It should improve the likelihood that many of the black African states will renew diplomatic relations with Israel. Certainly the return of the Sinai to Egypt as part of a peace treaty should help eliminate one reason that the black African states gave for breaking diplomatic ties.

Although the Arabs have been quite successful in obtaining Third World backing at the UN and in other international forums on the Palestinians and other Middle East issues, there have also been indications that some Third World countries are tired of being tied to an endless crusade against Israel and the Jewish people. In addition, a number of African countries have come to the Arabs to complain about increased oil prices and to request more aid. Some have suggested, partially as a bargaining maneuver with the Arabs, that they intend to renew diplomatic ties with Israel, especially if more aid is not forthcoming. Quite evidently, tensions exist beneath the surface of Arab-African solidarity.

The major powers can also influence events. The Soviet Union will probably sustain those Arabs who are opposed to Egypt politically and in other ways, whereas the United States will undoubtedly continue to support efforts toward peace and constructive exchanges. In addition, it is assisting in the inauguration of new Israeli technical assistance efforts for the Third World. Much will also depend on the resistance of the West Europeans, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to Arab blandishments against Israel, especially at the UN.

A large proportion of Israel's relations with individual countries will be affected by its own progress in social integration and modernization. It can continue to attract respect and emulation as long as it deals forthrightly with the challenges of its own society.

Both Israel and the developing countries, on the basis of three decades of experience, should be able to look forward to relations based on neither euphoria nor despair. The need is to be realistic about ways to strengthen mutual interests and concerns and to find practical means to enhance their respective positions within the world system.

Abraham in Egypt

HOWARD SCHWARTZ

Somehow
I had come to the desert
Too soon
There nothing flourished
But the twin herbs of fear
And despair
And there was nothing
Not even a single star
To guide me
For my fire was out.

Still
I kept watch
And so I saw the white bird
Flying toward me
That dropped a single seed
At my feet —
And I cradled it
And kneaded the earth to make it ready
And planted it
While the seed was still damp
From its source.

In this way
White blossoms came to appear
And soon there was a single fruit
And when I broke it open
I found as many seeds
As stars
And when I tasted it
I drank from the spring that winds
Within
And followed it as far as I could
Knowing it would lead me
Out of Egypt.

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The God of Mordecai Kaplan

DAVID BRUSIN

I

THE USES OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE ARE VAST and far reaching; moreover, the language of religion is not the exclusive domain of one segment of the intellectual community. Two examples follow, the former a parable, the latter a nightmare. Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher, wrote the first; Elie Wiesel, a survivor, wrote the second.

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, "I seek God! I seek God!" As many of those who do not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Why, did he get lost? said one. Did he lose his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding! Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated? Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his glances.

"Whither is God," he cried. "I shall tell you. *We have killed him* — you and I. . . . God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. . . ."

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke and went out. "I come too early," he said then; "my time has not come yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering — it has not yet reached the ears of man. . . ."¹

One day when we came back from work, we saw three gallows rearing up in the assembly place, three black crows. Roll call. SS all round us, machine guns trained: the traditional ceremony. Three victims in chains — and one of them, the little servant, the sad eyed angel. . . .

The three victims mounted together onto the chairs.

The three necks were placed at the same moment within the nooses.

"Long live liberty!" cried the two adults.

But the child was silent.

"Where is God? Where is He?" someone behind me asked.

At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over.

Total silence throughout the camp. . . .

Then the march past began. . . .

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. . . .

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

"Where is God now?"

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

"Where is He? Here He is — He is hanging here on this gallows. . . ."²

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), pp. 95-96.

2. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, translated by Stella Rodway (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), pp. 70-71.

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Nietzsche's spokesman is a madman; it is he who announces the death of God. But his listeners are not ready. He comes too early. They will not accept what they themselves have done. They have murdered their God and they are afraid to face that fact. Or so the madman tells them. Yet who in this narrative is truly mad? And how can God be dead? After all, it is a madman who proclaims His death. What, then, is Nietzsche really trying to tell us?

Wiesel's narrative is incredible and absurd. Surely God is not hanging on those gallows. But madness is the order of the day in the camps. Although the murderers know full well what they are doing, they do not knowingly murder their God. Yet Nietzsche's narrative is fictional; Wiesel's is not. What, then, is madness and what is sanity? In what sense does God live and in what sense can one speak of His death?

These two eye-witness accounts of God and man, madness and reality, make as serious a statement about human life and society as one can imagine. And that is precisely what religion is supposed to do: provide insight into the human condition, provide insight into the world around us, the world within us, and the world between us. To inquire into the understanding of God in Judaism is to ask how talk of God in Jewish circles has contributed to these endeavors.

II

Mordecai Kaplan has made a considerable and significant contribution to that understanding. His method of inquiry has two main features. To start with, in discussing God, Kaplan refuses to use words whose meanings are problematic and unclear — words like *soul*, *spirit*, *incorporeal*, *supreme being*, and *perfect being*. It follows, therefore, that he must develop his view of God differently, without recourse to such notions, and it follows that the awareness or discovery of God, for Kaplan, must find its source in history and nature, in what is given to the senses, rather than in the nature or idea of God.

The second general feature of Kaplan's view is that a complete definition or explanation of God is unattainable in principle. What we know of God comes to us originally from the senses, through the endless flow of human experience;³ therefore, no theologian or philosopher can presume to give us the last word on the subject.

Interpreting experience may be endless, but it is not futile. According to Kaplan, the search for God becomes an end in itself insofar as it involves one in the life-long pursuit of meaning and value. Kaplan's investigation focuses, accordingly, on the nature of man and on the identification of

3. It is in this sense that Kaplan takes exception to the standard interpretation of the phrase "the knowledge of God," as in Hosea 4:6, for instance. The verb *yada*, Kaplan argues, does not refer to propositional knowledge in these contexts, but to the "empirical experience or awareness" of God. (Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* [New York: Macmillan Company, 1970], p. 20).

God in nature. Identifying the divine in life and determining the meaning of *God* are two sides of the same theological coin. Thus, Kaplan begins by defining *God* as that force or power in the universe, and, hence, in man, that is identified in its striving for goodness, fulfillment, redemption or salvation, all of which terms are used interchangeably. Kaplan knows that God cannot be defined once and for all. He makes no claim to know what God is. Clarifying what we mean by the term "God" is where we must begin if our search is to have any meaning at all. All of this by itself in no way excludes revelation (or its exposition in halakhah) as a legitimate source of God's will. Nothing in Kaplan's overall approach precludes the possibility that Torah and Talmud offer us a history and record of the divine outpouring in the past.⁴ Kaplan's initial concern is with the meaning of *God* and *godliness*, an issue that is logically prior to all others. Before we speak of God's will, God's word, or God's *mizvot*, we should have some idea of what we mean by *God*.

III

In *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, Kaplan writes:

[I]n the very process of human self-fulfillment, . . . we identify ourselves with God, and God functions in us. . . . If human beings are frustrated, it is not because there is no God, but because they do not deal with reality as it is actually and potentially constituted.⁵

Belief in God . . . can function . . . as an affirmation that life has value. It implies, as the God idea has always implied, a certain assumption with regard to the nature of reality, the assumption that reality is so constituted as to endorse and guarantee the realization in man of that which is of greatest value to him. If we believe that assumption to be true, for . . . it is an assumption that is not susceptible of proof, we have faith in God. No metaphysical speculation beyond this fundamental assumption that reality assures both the emergence and the realization of human ideals is necessary for the religious life.⁶

Kaplan's statement of faith closely parallels Rabbi Akiva's teleological proof of God's existence.

A certain man once asked Rabbi Akiva: "Tell me, who created the world?" "The Holy One, praised be He, created the world," answered Rabbi Akiva. "I want you to give me proof positive that it was God who created the world," persisted the man. "Come back tomorrow," said Rabbi Akiva. The following day, when the man returned, Rabbi Akiva asked: "What is this you are

4. Throughout his writings Kaplan refers to Biblical and Rabbinical sources, citing texts that support his position one time, and those that do not another. See, especially, chapter 2 of *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood* and Mordecai M. Kaplan and Arthur A. Cohen, *If Not Now, When?* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), pp. 29-32, 37-40, 67-68. In one place, Kaplan describes this as an examination of the "Laws that reveal God," (Mordecai M. Kaplan, "Interdependence of Religion and Science" in *Shiv'im: Essays and Studies in Honor of Ira Eisenstein*, edited by Ronald A. Brauner [New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1977], p. 17).

5. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1962), pp. 26-27.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

wearing?" "It is my coat," said the man. "Who made it?" asked Akiva. "The weaver, of course," answered the man. "I don't believe you. Prove it," retorted Akiva. The man replied: "What can I say? Everyone knows that the weaver weaves the cloth!" Rabbi Akiva then said: "Yet you don't know that the Holy One, praised be He, created the world?" When the man left, Akiva's students questioned him as follows: "What have you really proved?" Rabbi Akiva replied: "Just as the house is proof of the builder, and the garment is proof of the weaver, and the wooden door is proof of the carpenter, so too does the very existence of the world give proof that there is a creator, the Holy One, praised be He."⁷

One either sees nature as evidence for the Creator or one does not. Likewise, Kaplan sees what happens in the world and in history as evidence for the possibility of realizing that which is good and of value in man. A similar assumption is implicit in Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism. The halakhah has both intrinsic and extrinsic merit; it is a self-justifying and self-fulfilling mode of life that simultaneously points beyond itself.⁸ What is good and of value in man is, in turn, translated into meaningful patterns of behavior that, together with experiential and ideational components, comprise the evolving culture and life-style of the Jewish people. There is no other way, in Kaplan's opinion, to establish a rationale for perpetuating Judaism.⁹ This further implies, Kaplan reasons, that man must go in search of God.

We shall not come to experience the reality of God unless we go in search of Him. To be seekers of God, we have to depend more upon our own thinking and less upon tradition. . . . [W]e must accustom ourselves to find God in the complexities of our experience and behavior. "Seek ye me and live." To seek God, to inquire after Him, to try to discern His reality is religion in action.¹⁰

Clearly, these are not the words of an atheist, though, remarkably enough, some have so described Kaplan.

Others maintain that in abandoning the belief in a personal God, Kaplan has broken irrevocably with the history of Judaism.¹¹ This, too, is remarkable since Kaplan has never rejected the idea of a personal God. As usual, however, he insists on explaining what he means by "personal God," something his critics seldom do.

7. *Midrash Temurah*, chapter 5. See also Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah's version of the argument from design in *Hullin* 59a-60b.

8. See Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition*, 7, 2 (Summer, 1965), especially pp. 50-53, and "Catharsis," *Tradition*, 17, 2 (Spring, 1978): 44-50. In the last section of the latter paper, he observes that Judaism "has stated that there is a spark of divinity in man . . . Man, as seen as Judaism, is potentially a good, progressive being" (52-53).

9. See Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1956), pp. 188-191, 226-227, and Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967) [first published 1934, The Macmillan Co.], Part Five, chapters 25 and 26, and Parts Three and Six.

10. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, p. 30.

11. See, for example, the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Volume 7, p. 664, and Jacob B. Agus, *Modern Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: Behrman House, 1941), pp. 306-307 and 343-347.

To conceive of God is to regard him as personal, in the sense that He manifests Himself in our personality, in every effort of ours to live up to our responsibilities as human beings.¹²

The possibility of believing in a personal God depends on what one means by the term "personal." . . .

The real question is: "Does the belief that there is a God make any difference in our personal life?" A God who makes a difference in one's personal life should be designated as a personal God. . . . God is thus personal to us. . . . In this sense, it is possible to believe in a personal God.¹³

Kaplan is speaking again of what it *means* "to believe in a personal God." That Jews do is taken for granted; how to understand the content of such a belief is something else. Surely there is no a priori reason to deny that what Kaplan means by "belief in a personal God" is consistent with the history of Judaism.

Some critics argue that Kaplan's conception of God as the power that makes for salvation reduces God's existence to human imagination.¹⁴ To this charge of radical naturalism, Kaplan typically responds as follows:

Human nature is a part of the larger world of nature, and man's salvation can only be conceived as a manifestation of a Divine Power both within and beyond man. That is why human salvation, or self-fulfillment, is inconceivable without God. God is that aspect of the cosmos that makes for man's salvation. Man is dependent on God, though God needs man as the sculptor needs the clay. . . .¹⁵

IV

Even these few citations from Kaplan should make it clear why, among theologians, he is considered a mere sociologist while among sociologists he is regarded as too theological. This kind of oversimplification should not surprise us because Kaplan's theology grows out of his understanding of human nature and society; at the same time, his interest in sociology and psychology is informed, in large part, by his conception of God and of man's ability to have knowledge of God. From one perspective, Kaplan's theology revolves around, and is anchored in, his epistemology, his view of what man can know of God. Herein also lies the core of Kaplan's so-called theological revolution in Judaism, a revolution that has frequently been attacked on the grounds of being inconsistent with "normative" Jewish thinking and as being indistinguishable, in theory, from naturalism.

Knowledge of God, for Kaplan, does not proceed from abstraction in thought and language, but, rather, depends upon our knowledge of man

12. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask*, p. 103.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

14. See, for instance, Eliezer Berkovits, "Reconstructionist Theology: A Critical Evaluation" (New York: Jonathan David), pp. 40-41, reprinted from *Tradition*, 2, 1 (Fall, 1959).

15. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1967), p. 119.

and society. The former, which attempts to define the nature and being of God, formulates logically consistent systems composed of statements that are neither confirmed nor denied by experience. For the most part, such reasoning, whether sound or unsound, interesting or uninteresting, has no real bearing on human experience: it is neither derived from, nor does it support, conclusions about human life or society. Kaplan redirects the efforts of the theologian from the transcendental — the realm of godliness, that which reflects or mirrors the transcendental of which we can have no *direct* knowledge, according to Kaplan.¹⁶

Stressing the immanent as a central theological category is his link with the history of Jewish ideas. For Kaplan thereby shares with that history the belief that the essence of religion does not lie in our knowledge of God's nature but in our understanding of the notion of *imitatio dei*. This belief, contained in one verse of the Torah, Genesis 1:27, forms the cornerstone as well as the central paradox of Judaism: how man can be like God.¹⁷ Kaplan's "revolution" is actually his intellectual struggle to shake off the influence of preceding centuries, specifically that of western philosophy of virtually the last millennium. He attempts to reinstate a much earlier way of speaking about God, that of Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism, resting as it does on pre-philosophical and pre-scientific foundations.¹⁸ This appears revolutionary only because we still operate with misleading mistranslations and misconceptions. The Biblical term *ruah*, for example, should not be translated as *spirit*; it means *breath*, *wind*, or possibly *power*.¹⁹ *Nefesh* is not the Biblical equivalent for *soul*; it means *life-entity* or *being*.²⁰ We have inherited the conceptual and linguistic habit

16. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization*, p. 316.

17. "And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"; cf. Genesis 5:1, 9:6. See the illuminating essay "Imitatio Dei" in Martin Buber, *Israel and the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), pp. 66-77.

18. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, pp. 6-9.

19. *Ruah adonai* generally designates a special wind from God as in 2 Kings 2:16, Isaiah 40:7, Ezekiel 37:1, and Exodus 14:21. Sometimes it refers to internal, physical strength, as in Judges 3:10, 6:34, 14:6, and 15:12. It also denotes the quality of leadership, strength of character and personality, e.g., in Micah 3:8, Isaiah 11: 1-5, Judges 6:34, 13:24-25, 1 Samuel 16:13-14. See, also, Isaiah 31:3, where *ruah*, that which the Egyptian horses lack, seems to mean brute power or strength.

Ruah elohim, on the other hand, usually signals the gift of prophecy, the innate ability to speak and act on God's behalf. See, for example, Numbers 24:2, 1 Samuel 10:10 and 19:20, and 2 Chronicles 24:19ff. There are many interesting exceptions to the foregoing, for example, in Genesis 1:2 where *ruah elohim* is used, somewhat mysteriously, in both senses, as a special, hovering wind as well as latent power or energy; and Exodus 31:2ff. and 35:31 where the special gift is that of artistic creativity rather than prophetic vision. Also, see 1 Samuel 10:6 where *ruah adonai* connotes the gift of prophecy.

Ruah, by itself, has many meanings, such as *courage*, *life*, *mind*, among others. The distinction between *ruah adonai* and *ruah elohim* is discussed at length in Eliezer Berkovits, *Man and God: Studies in Biblical Theology* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), chapter 2. Of course, the Rabbis also understood *ruah ha'kodesh* as the gift of prophecy. See *Yoma* 9b.

20. The root meaning of *nefesh* is *breath* (as in Genesis 1:20); it also translates, in various contexts, as *person*, *living being*, *creature*, *life-essence*, *life*, and the like. To cite a few examples, see Exodus 1:5 and 21:23, Leviticus 11:46, Job 9:21, Hosea 9:4, and 1 Samuel 20:1.

of treating man as a Cartesian duality even when it is no longer philosophically respectable or profitable to do so. Kaplan will not rely on concepts that he does not understand. To persist in viewing man as consisting of soul and body, mind and matter, is out of the question for him. Judaism, too, has always regarded man as an organic whole, no matter how we are accustomed to naming his parts.

Although the phrase "Judaism without Supernaturalism" may sound novel and revolutionary, in point of fact it is not. For a long time, occidental philosophy and science (pre-Einsteinian) has imposed on our way of thinking a model of the world that sees nature as governed by immutable laws. The world is sometimes compared to a giant clock, wound up in the distant past and running forever according to unchanging, irreversible, and strictly mechanical laws of nature. This leaves God, whether viewed as creator or not, outside of, or above, nature — *supernatural*, as we are used to saying. Divine intervention, on this model, is highly problematic with respect both to nature and human affairs.

Judaism however, has never so conceived of God or nature. The paradox of a transcendent God who is active in human affairs and whose ways can be known is nowhere more plainly stated than in Solomon's remarks at the dedication of the Temple, recorded in 1 Kings:

But will God really dwell on earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this House that I have built. Yet turn, O Lord my God, to the prayer and supplication of your servant, and hear the cry and prayer which Your servant offers before You this day. May Your eyes be open day and night toward this House . . . (8:27-29). (Solomon concludes, as he must, with the ultimate confirmation of God's concern with Jewish history): . . . pardon Your people who have sinned against You. . . . For they are Your very own people that You freed from Egypt. . . . For You, O Lord, have set them apart for Yourself from all the peoples of the earth as Your very own, as You promised through Moses Your servant when You freed our fathers from Egypt (8:50-53).²¹

In history and through nature, God pardons, promises, punishes, acts, cares, is accessible. The metaphor of God as "over and above nature," as "supernatural" is misleading and inaccurate. God *fills* the world; He dwells even here in this House, in this thorn-bush.²² Solomon's metaphor

21. This passage is further explained by the mystical doctrine of *zimzum* (contraction, withdrawal) in *Exodus Rabba* 34:

When God told Moses to make him a *mishkan*, Moses questioned Him and said: "God's Glory fills heaven and earth and yet He says, 'Make me a *mishkan*' . . . God said: 'You don't think as I do; twenty planks in the north, twenty in the south, and eight in the west; moreover, I will descend and *contract* my *Shekhinah* within one square cubit.'"

Zimzum is, in Rav Soloveitchik's words, "the mystery of God, the infinite, residing in finitude." Later in the same essay, Soloveitchik connects *zimzum* with man: "If God withdrew, and creation is a result of His withdrawal, then, guided by the principle of *Imitatio Dei*, we are called upon to do the same. Jewish ethics, then, requires man, in certain situations, to withdraw." Kaplan would agree, it seems to me. (Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, "Majesty and Humility," *Tradition*, 17, 2 [Spring, 1978]: 32, 35-36).

22. See *Exodus Rabba*, II, 5, and Isaiah 66:1ff.

of “containment” captures a profound Jewish insight. Kaplan’s metaphor of “religious naturalism” points to the same truth. In Judaism, God is both immanent and transcendent; the task is to decipher this into traditional religious categories. Solomon does so with one kind of metaphor, Kaplan with another. In so doing, they further extend the limits of religious language (as do Nietzsche and Wiesel). Separated by three millennia, they share the same *Weltanschauung*; they search, each in his own way, for satisfactory metaphors to articulate that shared world-view, metaphors compatible with the vastly different *Lebensanschauung* of each.

Transcendent is not the counterpart of *supernatural*. A supernatural God cannot intervene in the affairs of nature or humanity. A transcendent God, on the other hand, can be immanent as well. Creation and revelation bridged the gap for all time. Man and world are God’s creation; therefore, God is not identical with nature. Nature is regular, as Genesis 8:22 affirms,²³ but it is not self-sustaining. It continues to exist only because God so decrees, daily: *ha’mehadsh b’tuvo b’khol yom tamid ma’aseh b’reshet* — “God renews creation each and every day without fail,” as is expressed in the liturgy, in the *yozer* prayer. For Judaism, all of nature falls within the proper sphere of divine action, human history in particular. Moreover, God’s presence in history, even when it appears to disrupt nature’s regularity, is only so revealed. In Biblical and Rabbinic terms, a *nés*, *ot*, or *mofet* (what we refer to as a “miracle”) is not only possible, it is expected *so long as God continues to care about creation*. Indeed, as the etymology of the Hebrew words suggest, it is proof that God still cares, for “miracles” are “signposts” or “ensigns” that point beyond themselves.²⁴ The “miracle” at the Sea of Reeds is brought about by a wind from God, the result of natural causes. First and foremost, though, it is an *ot* — a sign — of God’s concern for man, as “miraculous” then as it is now. Rabbinic Judaism again gives consummate expression to this in the liturgy for the *Amidah*, where thrice daily we thank God for the miracles that come to us in everyday occurrences.

We give thanks to you . . . for your miracles, which are daily with us, and for your wonders and your benefits, which are brought at all times, evening, morning, and noon.²⁵

The signs of God’s enduring concern are the “miracles” of everyday life.

V

Kaplan’s naturalism is not as radical as his detractors have claimed. So

23. “So long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will not cease.”

24. I owe this observation to Dr. Monford Harris who bears no responsibility for its use in this essay.

25. The same thought recurs throughout Rabbinic literature. In seeking to sanctify the commonplace, to distinguish between the sacred and the profane, halakhic Judaism in its entirety is an expression of this simple and profound Biblical insight.

long as one sees the world through classical western eyes, the mind-body, mental-physical dichotomy dictates one's view of man and God. Decades ahead of his time, Kaplan realized that the philosophical separation of the natural and supernatural, as applied to religion's understanding of man and God, is itself nothing less than a dogma or presupposition, one that is open to serious doubt.

Consistent with the Rabbinic way of thinking, Kaplan's central theological concern shifts to the problem of *imitatio dei*: how man, *who is not God*, can manifest godliness. This, for Kaplan, is the main issue facing religion in the twentieth century. It is likewise one of the basic touchstones of Rabbinic Judaism whose failure to formulate a Jewish "theology" is often noted but seldom appreciated. Rabbinic Judaism embodies a distinctive conception of God, but it is not "theological" in the accepted, western philosophical sense of the word. Rabbinic theology is rooted in man and the covenantal society; similarly, Kaplan's is rooted in anthropology and sociology interpreted in the light of his notion of Jewish peoplehood.

The term "pragmatist" has been used disparagingly in reference to Kaplan, possibly because he subscribes to some version of the following principles: Ask not what God is but of what value is your conception of God; Ask not what God is but how man can walk in His ways. If this be religious pragmatism, Biblical and Rabbinic thinking is no less pragmatic.

And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His ways, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and *nefesh* (Deut. 10:12).

The Lord will establish you as His holy people, as He swore to you, if you keep the *mizvot* of the Lord your God and walk in His ways (Deut. 28:9).²⁶

Rabbinic Judaism, in elucidating what it means to "walk in His ways," fully endorses the spirit of these principles.²⁷

R. Hama . . . said: What does the text mean: *You shall walk after the Lord your God?* . . . The meaning is to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked, . . . so do you . . . clothe the naked; as the Holy One, blessed be He, visits the sick, . . . so do you visit the sick; as the Holy One, blessed be He, comforts mourners, . . . so do you comfort mourners; as the Holy One, blessed be He, buries the dead, so do you bury the dead (*Sotah* 14a).

A familiar comment on Deuteronomy 11:22 explains in broader terms:

26. See, also, Genesis 18:19, Exodus 34:6-7, Leviticus 19:2, Deuteronomy 8:6, 11:22, 13:5, and 26:17.

27. Cf. *Shabbat* 133b. In restricting the study of *ma'aseh b'resheet* and *ma'aseh merkabah* (creation and metaphysics), the Rabbis further emphasize the centrality and importance of *halakhah*, of determining what "walking in His ways" means. The Jew does not worry about God's essence; he worries about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, burying the dead, etc.

Just as the Holy One, praised be He, is called Merciful, so you should be merciful; just as He is called Gracious, so you should be gracious; just as He is called Righteous, so you should be righteous; just as He is called *Hasid*, so you should be a *hasid* (*Sifré, Ekev, 49*).

For the Rabbis, the halakhic community, the covenantal society, is built upon our understanding of “walking in His ways;” for Kaplan, a just social order, the just society, reflects and helps to define our understanding of God. For both, it is the individual’s responsibility to work towards the realization of the just society irrespective of his or her particular conception of God.

VI

Though not himself a Reconstructionist, Martin Buber alludes to yet another important aspect of Kaplan’s approach to God in his retelling of a popular Hasidic tale:

In the *Amidah* we say, “Our God and God of our fathers; the God of Abraham, The God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.” Is that not redundant? No, we are told, for there are two types of individuals in this world with different approaches to God. One type of person believes in God because his parents believed. For him we say, “Our God and God of our fathers.” The second type of individual seeks the answers for himself. He, too, finds God, not because of his forefathers, but because of his own search. For this person we say, “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob” for they, too, found God for themselves.

What is characteristic about Reconstructionism is not the definition that you formulate at the end of your investigation, but the fact that you undertake such a study in the first place. How you understand God is less important at the outset than the fact that you make a continuing effort to do so.²⁸ Given that our experience is always changing, and along with it our understanding and perception of God, it is vital that this be so.

It means facing up to Nietzsche’s madman and Wiesel’s madness. It means experiencing for oneself *yeziat mizraim* and *matan torah* as well as the destruction of the first and second temples; it means discovering for oneself the genius of Midrash and Talmud, while coming to grips with the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews en masse from all major centers of European life and culture. It means responding to, and transmitting, the reality of the Shoah as well as the birth of the modern state of Israel. This, too, is as it should be. For religion, at its best, puts before us the central issues of human life and history. Jewish religiosity is our willingness to react as Jews to those issues. As our experience changes, so do the questions and, in turn, the response.

By the same inner drive that moves a person to pray — to shout out for what is needed or simply for what is given — by that same dark drive a Jew is moved to respond to the idea of God, to the God of Jewish history, to that conception of God that emerges out of, and in direct relation to, the changing pattern of Jewish life and thought from Biblical days to the

28. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask*, pp. 80-81.

present moment. Rabbi Kaplan has added to that developing Jewish understanding of God not as a Reconstructionist but as another thinker in a long chain beginning with Abraham and stretching through Jewish space-time to the present hour. Labels such as "humanist," "reconstructionist" or "naturalist" arise from his writings because there are those who see fit to categorize his thinking; they are compelled to do so, in part, because they dismiss his conclusions at the outset. Perhaps it is reassuring to reject Kaplan because he is a "religious naturalist," if you are convinced, for whatever reasons, that religious naturalism is antithetical to Judaism. The real issue is not one of labels, obviously. I, for one, see no reason to subsume all of Kaplan's thinking under one or more ambiguous headings. I likewise see no basis for speaking of *the* Reconstructionist understanding of God. Kaplan suggests an approach that is fruitful and interesting in its own right, one that shares a great deal with Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism; yet he makes no claim to offer a definitive and exhaustive statement of his, or our, understanding of God.²⁹ What is required, to start with, is that we agree to be concerned with the role of God (or the idea of God) in Jewish life and history and in its literary sources. If we can join together in this quest for religious truth, it should make little difference under what name the search is carried on.

VII

Nietzsche once summarized his problem with God in one line; perhaps it is similar to what Wiesel felt at the moment when he emerged from the ashes of Auschwitz and faced anew the challenge of walking among the living. "If God existed," Nietzsche wrote, "how could I bear not to be God." Franz Rosenzweig comments:

It is with consuming hatred that the defiant self views divine freedom, devoid of all defiance, which drives him to denial because he has to regard it as license . . . God's freedom . . . drives . . . (one) to this self-assertion.³⁰

Herein lies the essence of the God idea in Judaism. When the living man confronts the living God it is an act of defiance. How can God, with His infinite freedom, remain infinitely silent in the face of human suffering?³¹ That God can is proof that man is not God and must carry this knowledge within him. Yet, as Wiesel has shown, this act of defiance can lead to affirmation and self-assertion. It can serve to confirm our contin-

29. Ibid., pp. 81-82.

30. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, translated by William W. Hallo (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1971), p. 18.

31. And so, with tragic irony, the character of Sam in Elie Wiesel's newly published play ("a *Purimschpiel* within a *Purimschpiel*") asserts the following: "When human beings kill one another, where is God to be found? You see Him among the killers. I find Him among the victims." The scene from *Night* quoted earlier takes on new meaning. (Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God*, translated by Marion Wiesel [New York: Random House, 1979], pp. 128-129).

ued identity as *Am Yisrael*. At Peniel, Jacob survived a mysterious encounter with an unknown assailant; at its conclusion, he received the name *Yisrael* because he had "*striven with God and man*" (Genesis 32:29).

To remain a Jew is to persist in that struggle with and against God. To continue without God is to take a different path altogether. To be a Jew is to acknowledge our connection with all of Jewish history. To be a Jew is, thus, to know that God hardened Pharoah's heart because Pharoah was insensitive to the pain of others. And to be a Jew is to know that God sent Sadat to Jerusalem because Sadat is sensitive to human life and needless suffering. Only through human history, Kaplan reminds us, does God's will become known. In a word, to be a Jew is to ask endlessly *what it means to be a Jew*. This requires deciding in our generation, as Kaplan tried to do in his, what "walking in His ways" means in theory and practice. In Micah's words, "He has told you, O man, what is good, And what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8).

Jewish Survival

ABRAHAM S. HALKIN

I

A GENERALIZATION WHICH IS SO UNIVERSALLY accepted that it is repeated without examination or criticism is the conviction that the uninterrupted existence of the Jewish people is in the class of the miraculous. Their survival, vis-a-vis the history of ancient nations, of whom no similar assertion can be made, serves as proof that it is, necessarily, the consequence of Providence, of promises by God that Israel is to be an eternal entity. Serious scholars who have sought to understand the phenomenon have undertaken explanations of it. Krochmal, for example, believes that the spirit of the Absolute inheres within Israel and excludes it from the fate of other nations which have almost always passed through the stages of becoming, of enjoying their greatness, and of disintegration. The Jews, who have already gone through this cycle three times, he argues, are now in a fourth repetition of it. Yehezkel Kaufmann deals with the same issue in his major book, *Exile and Alienage*. In it he explains the history of the Jews as a dispersed group, a minority everywhere, that has successfully stayed alive despite all adversity. While he reckons with their religious identity as a mark of differentiation, he is just as impressed with their alienage, with the fact that wherever they lived in historic times, the dominant multitude (including other ethnic groups which may have also settled there) considered them as foreigners, as not belonging to the area or to its population.

In the Winter 1978 issue of JUDAISM, Professor Evyatar Friesel turned his attention to an evaluation of the subject, but his objective is to establish that Zionism is in the spirit of the Jewish tradition. To demonstrate it, he proves that throughout their history Jews have always expediently (and successfully) resolved the challenge of the tension between the need to adjust to the ways of the community within which they resided and the need to remain loyal to their tradition in creed and in deed.

The introductory paragraph of his study, which once again recites the belief about the uniqueness of Jewish continued existence, has incited me to put into writing a number of conclusions which have long been my opinion and the fruit of my studies.

It is simply wrong to maintain that only the Jews have succeeded in surviving, despite all hardships and disasters. One cannot overlook the fact that, everywhere, there are population groups, other than wanderers who came from without, who are most certainly the descendants of forefathers who were contemporaries of our patriarchs or even earlier. No wholesale destruction is known that left no trace of life behind. (We

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know that, even in the story of the Flood, eight human beings, not counting Og, King of Bashan, came out of the ark after the destructive rains.) Nations and cities, bearing the names of old, continue to exist and they insist on seeing themselves as the descendants of the hoary past. Egyptians recently reintroduced into their history both the records of the Pharaonic dynasties and the assumption that they are their offspring. Iran, not long ago, made a big to-do around Cyrus, and, with the Shah, the entire population, as well as many invited foreigners, celebrated the history of the Persians whose beginnings go back to that early king. Moreover, the language spoken in Iran is a direct continuation of Old- and Middle-Persian. Similarly, Greece maintained a continuous life even before it regained its political independence in the nineteenth century, and its language is the product of the evolution of the tongue that Homer and Plato spoke. Other cases can be cited in evidence. Clearly, from the ethnic point of view, our continued existence is not the sole example.

Nor can Jews speak with greater certainty of the purity of their blood, and contend that in all the other situations the fusion of bloods has obliterated the ethnic purity of the community. Few would assert that such purity is true of Egypt, Greece, and other lands. What is even more significant, it is difficult to defend the assumption that, ethnically, the Jews are all the direct descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Who can disregard the untold instances of foreign blood which mixed with the Jewish strain in the continuing life of the group? Nor is it fair to forget the individuals who, from antiquity, have joined the Jews. Our Bible is replete with references to the sojourner and, at times (see Isaiah 56 and Ezekiel 47:22), the outsider who attached himself to God. Stories of violent rape in the numerous riots and pogroms resulted in the introduction into the group of non-Jewish blood and of physical characteristics, as did also the peaceful unions of Jewish and Gentile men and women.

II

The emphasis on the uniqueness of Jewish survival cannot be shifted, without objection, from the ethnic to the cultural. It is commonly the boast of the Jews that we have continued the Torah of Moses down through the ages, and that in this dedication, which is still with us, we are alone. This claim is likewise in need of reexamination, and we can proceed with it by relying on our own sources. Although it was believed, and is still by many, that the religious life which the Orthodox follow is a duplicate copy of the way in which Jews always lived, so that Abraham was sufficiently punctilious to observe every requirement, and Jacob could impress Esau by sending a message to him that during his servitude of Laban he had performed all the 613 commandments, the Biblical text, stripped of its Midrashic exposition, conveys the impression of a population still far from the image that is entertained of the past by the unhistorically-

minded. The books of the former prophets constantly accuse the Israelites of adopting the customs and practices of the surrounding societies, not to speak of the many charges of actual idol-worship. It is instructive to read, in Jeremiah, the conversation between him and the group which had fled to Egypt after the assassination of Gedaliah, the Jewish ruler in Judea who had been appointed by Nebuchadrezzar. In it, the women (and their husbands) make this reply to the prophet:

We will not listen to you in the name of the Lord. On the contrary, we will do everything which we have vowed — to make offerings to the Queen of Heaven, and to pour libations to her, as we used to do, we and our fathers, our kings and our officials in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty to eat, we were well off, and suffered no misfortunes. But ever since we stopped making offerings to the Queen of Heaven and pouring libations to her we have lacked everything, and we have been consumed by the sword and the famine. And when we make offerings to the Queen of Heaven and pour libations to her, is it without our husbands' approval that we have made cakes in her likeness and poured libations to her?" (Jer. 44:16-19).

It is a very telling argument, representative of many in that generation.

It must also be borne in mind that, although tradition recognizes Scripture as the unquestionable source of the Oral Law and maintains that, during the sojourn in the wilderness of Sinai, when God spoke to Moses, He also expounded the written Torah to him as He revealed it, such a position is not an unchallenged one. True, the very learned and polemically-minded Saadia (882-942 C.E.) claims that the Oral Law chronologically antedated Scripture, which was first written down in the fortieth year of the stay in Sinai. The Sadducees, in their time, and later the Karaites, unqualifiedly rejected this tenet of tradition. While these groups, notably the latter, developed their own exposition of the Torah in order to derive from it the great and unending needs of practices in the spirit of Torah, they did not credit their activity with divine inspiration, nor did they adhere to the belief that God gave Moses an Oral Law alongside Scripture. It is, in fact, reasonable to consider the growth of the Oral Law historically. While it is plausible and likely that, during the monarchy, Israelites who sought to follow the Torah necessarily performed its precepts in some fashion, with greater detail and fuller specification, and thus gradually created a style of life which was termed "life according to Torah," the development of the Oral Law is probably the result of a well-nigh deliberate decision.

It appears likely that, following the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. and the exile of a considerable portion of the population to Babylonia, a crisis was reached regarding which information is available in the Book of Ezekiel. Like their countrymen in Egypt, some Jews had arrived at the conclusion that the catastrophe was due to the demands of the Torah and of the Prophets, whereas the people who worshipped idols enjoyed peace and quiet, and even comfort. It is of them that Ezekiel thinks when he

exclaims: "And what comes into your minds shall not be at all; in that ye say: we will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone" (20:32). Other groups realized that the threats and warnings of God's prophets were confirmed by the events, but they concluded from their discovery that "our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are sick at heart of them; how can we survive?" Still another section of this group, likewise appreciative of how correct the prophets had been when they related the fate of the land and its people with their behavior towards God, adopted a more hopeful view. They were determined to carry on, and they understood that their existence depended on God and on His view of them. They reasoned that God's interest in man's actions cannot be limited to what is explicitly stated in Scripture, but that He approves or disapproves of everything that the person does. It becomes necessary, therefore, to learn what pleases or displeases God in every sphere of human activity, and that can be achieved by laying bare the implicit in the Bible. To my mind, this is the impulse which led to the development of the Oral Law. It grew into the industry of finding in Scripture both a support for the details and practices that had already accumulated around the precepts of the Torah as well as a means of drawing from the interpretation of the text further guidance and additional regulations.

Naturally, this outlook and way of life led to the formation of a religious community. When we appreciate the bearing of this radical transformation, we realize how, and why, for centuries, Jewry has been identified with Judaism. We became a religious society, a people dedicated to the service of God. It is as such that our continued existence has to be explained. In the same way that Christianity has survived for almost 2,000 years, and Islam for some 1,350, Judaism as practiced by Jews has maintained itself. Just as Christianity started as a missionary faith and has always believed in mission, Judaism, which preceded it, was actively engaged in winning souls. It suspended that activity when the daughter-religion proved to be much more successful than the mother. The latter had prepared the ground for the acceptance among Gentiles of its basic creed, but the new dispensation came forward with a creed quite similar to that of Judaism (plus, of course, the belief in Jesus and his role), and persuaded the masses to live without the observance of the practices of Judaism and yet be sure of their title to inherit a portion in the world-to-come. We may also add, as has been argued by Yehezkel Kaufmann, that, by adopting the Jewish faith, the proselyte became a Jew, with the burden of Jewish history and its tragic fate. As a convert to Christianity, however, he found it possible to continue as a member of whatever ethnic group he belonged to, but believing in the principles of his adopted faith and not in the tenets of most of his conationals.

In a world which turned increasingly Christian (or Moslem, starting with the late seventh century), the Jew became more and more different and distinct as a member of another group which both dominant faiths

disliked and tried to win over. Among the Christians in particular, and less so among the Moslems, Jews were exposed to regulation and disabilities, while the rulers and their subjects inflicted on them physical hardships, including persecution and murder, expulsion and exile.

This unfaltering dedication to their faith and to the determination to live by the prescriptions of the Torah and its expanding extent, produced some very radical positions. Whatever interest in science, literature and philosophy may have existed, was gone, as was the freedom to read whatever came to hand. The principle that "ye shall not follow their customs" (Leviticus 18:3) became the measure of which influences might be acceptable from the environment and which must not. True, life proved stronger than the prohibitions and, as we shall note, practices and beliefs penetrated the Jewish community from the outside, but the interdiction was always remembered and was frequently invoked by scholars who frowned on innovations which crept in. The religious life became more and more the single acceptable pattern of behavior, and deviations from it, or what appeared so to some, were combatted by the faithful who feared any change of attitude or performance in the society.

III

As was mentioned, in view of the dispersion of the Jews within the worlds of Christendom and Islam, the needs of life necessitated certain adjustments. At the very least, the Jews were compelled to acquire a speaking knowledge of the vernacular if they were to communicate and do business with the people in the towns where they resided. This adjustment did not prove difficult. Certainly, in the question of language, the Jews had not displayed a deep loyalty to their Hebrew. Wherever they lived, even in Erez Yisrael, they readily adopted the speech of the environment. True, they assumed the sacredness of Hebrew, and thereby they assured that it would not be forgotten. Moreover, in the Christian world, they continued to produce their books and studies in Hebrew, despite the use of the vernacular in daily intercourse. The reason was that, until the twelfth century, literary production in western Christendom was all in Latin (only popular compositions were in the spoken medium) and was overwhelmingly, monotonously religious, sermonic or edifying. Hence, there was little to draw the Jews, so that both the Latin and its contents were left virtually untouched, save by relatively few.

In the Islamic world, however, which, in consequence of the conversion of many Christians and Zoroastrians to the new faith, saw the efflorescence of the culture of the ancient Greeks, a considerable number of intellectually-minded Jews were sufficiently intrigued to study that Greek culture and use its language in the fields of medicine, mathematics, astronomy and philosophy. Normative Judaism, to the extent that it is legitimate to speak of it, and based, as it is, on Jewish law and on views and

doctrines contained in the Bible, Talmud and Midrash, resented and objected to the infringement of this Greek faction of civilization on the Jewish tradition. In the 13th and 14th centuries, its adherents were usually cool and, at times, actively hostile to these inroads of philosophy. Although some of the judgments of the philosophers trickled into the world of the unaffected, like the Thirteen Articles of Faith which Maimonides formulated, interest in them was regarded as non-Jewish. Essentially, the fear was that the infiltration of foreign matter into the religious body might shake it to its foundations.

It is as a religious minority in the medieval world that Judaism lived on, as a way of life with its attendant beliefs, hopes and expectations. These included not only theological principles, like the unity of God, revelation, reward and punishment, but, also, the promise of the restoration of political life, the ingathering of the dispersed members of the faith in the land of Israel, and the belief that this event would happen when God sent His Messiah to redeem the exiles. These hopes and expectations were incorporated into the prayers, the festivals, the momentous occasions — whether joyous or sad — and became part of the religious charge which the Jews carried from place to place and from age to age.

Despite the existence of Jewish communities which served as the natural environment for a child as he was growing up, learning ways of behavior and absorbing traditional knowledge and beliefs, contact between Jews and non-Jewish townsmen was continuous, and the effect of co-existence was mutual influence in varying degrees. Among the Jews there were some who, for one reason or another, crossed over to the Christian church or Moslem mosque. In the future it may perhaps be possible to gain a fairly accurate estimate of the number of those who converted. But, even until then, we can regard a considerable number of Jews as lost to us through conversion. The total is, of course, augmented when we think of the victims of attacks, riots, pogroms, and of forced baptism. In fact, it may be concluded that if, as is assumed, Jewish population in the world at the beginning of the nineteenth century was a million and a quarter, they may be properly called merely the remnant, that portion which continued to live as Jews, and derived from a much larger body, potentially or actually, that could have been alive. It has even been suggested that if the unfortunate disasters which befell them had not been visited on the Jews, they would now be a multitude of 150 million. Even today's population probably represents no more than 10% of that estimate. Does a really wide difference separate our situation from the fate of the Karaites or the Samaritans? They, too, were at one time numerous, with populations that were calculated in the millions, but which have dwindled to numbers that can rightly be called residues. True, the uninterrupted succession of members of the Jewish faith who have preferred to remain steadfast in their religious behavior may be justly denoted as survival and as proof of divine providence, but, by the same token,

Samaritans and Karaites have likewise survived. It is, I believe, far more exact to look upon these latter as remainders of numbers that were larger in the past. What seemed to be a trend toward relentless reduction was stemmed in the last century, either because circumstances helped in the increase of their count or because it is now possible to achieve favorable positions without converting, but they are survivors, nonetheless.

IV

Essentially, we are witnesses to a similar process in our own time. Before the Holocaust, modern Jewish history told of an amazing growth in numbers. (Although it was paralleled by a similar growth in the general European population, the ratio was eight-fold among the Jews and four-fold generally.) At the same time, it was possible to discern an assimilatory current, which appeared in the later eighteenth century and has gained such momentum in this one that the danger to survival looms again. Forces stronger than the powers of cohesion among the group, as a result of the relative freedom that Jews now enjoy in society and the uncritical acceptance of what the environment places at their disposal, have worked havoc upon adherence to tradition and loyalty to community. In step with what goes on around them, Jews have joined the materialistic drives, the pursuit of pleasures and entertainments, the goals of the educational system. Although Jews were attracted, in greater or lesser measure, to the offerings of the environment in the past, the generally religious world of the Gentiles found its counterpart in the submission of the Jews to their faith. Notwithstanding the degree of acculturation manifested by Jews, the step of merging with the majority could be only conversion. Moreover, since religion imposed on the parents the duty of instructing the children in the tenets of Judaism, the Jewish resources of the intellectuals were rich as they drank avidly of the culture in the dominant group. In modern times, what has really facilitated assimilation to the point of slipping out from the Jewish group is that the culture which they now imbibe is in place of Jewish education, and adherence to tradition has been seriously weakened, both because of the loss of respect for their own religious beliefs and practices, and because of a similar loss in the major group which stimulated the abandonment by the Jewish individuals of what had been the bastion and fortress against disappearance.

As a result, a vast majority of the Jewish people in every part of the world have released themselves, some less than others, from the bonds in which religion held them. At the same time, as general education has become the share of the entire population, the "masses" of today who, though educated, are no different from the "masses" of yore, have lost all sense of respect and awe of the "elders," of the learned and refined. They feel themselves equal to everybody else, they have their spokesmen, while entertainers and managers of the theater, radio and television reckon

with their tastes and their wants. In sum, Jewry is now made up of millions of articulate members, each one deciding by his own sights what he wants and what he has a right to demand. As no religious barriers stand in the way, young men and women experience love and lust, and respond to them. Inter-marriage between Jew and non-Jew, rich and poor, white and black, Protestant and Catholic, is now common, if less widespread than joint life without marriage. Apart from this phenomenon, many Jews possessing nothing of their Jewish heritage, or almost nothing, hang on by a string, and quite often by less. Some of them, craving something to fill the void, join all manner of groups — third world movements, Hari Krishna, Moonies, transcendental meditation, Jews for Jesus, and others. Conversion is, as a rule, not necessary for either abandoning the world of their forebears or joining these extraneous cults. Thus, a steady whittling away continues. The remainder, those who are still consciously and actively Jewish, are literally a remnant, the diehard core that persistently lives like its ancestors in the past.

V

It is well-known that the memory of the relation between the Jews and the Holy Land is fully preserved in our literature. Our prayers and numerous writings are proof. Since the prophetic doctrine that God is the sole agent of whatever happens in the world was adopted by the Jews and by their leaders, at least in the area of their political and territorial destiny, they gave expression to that faith and hope in the works which they composed. The God-sent Messiah, empowered by his Master, would fight the wars that would precede the redemption, would gather the Jews from the four corners of the earth to the land of Israel, would resurrect the dead and reestablish the political regime in the land. This belief was preserved in several Midrashim, and became a dogma in the list of Jewish articles of faith, as in the Thirteen Principles of Maimonides. Realistically, it was a tenet like the other beliefs, like the unity of God, the theophany on Mt. Sinai — integral doctrines of their religious world. As the restoration was an event which God would bring on, it never occurred to Jews that, by their action, resettlement might become a practical possibility. When conditions in the land of their residence were tolerable, the thought of emigration certainly did not occur. God would bring it about when it was deserved, or when it became due on His time-table. When life in a given locality turned difficult and they had to flee, or when an expulsion was decreed, they did not reason that the uprooting should be followed by a return to the Promised Land. Occasionally a messiah did arise, who announced that he was God's messenger, to make the belief in the restoration come true. But when the miracle did not occur, his believers were disappointed and returned to their daily pursuits. Neither expulsion nor the false messiahs were followed by an initiative of the group to take

matters in hand. When it became necessary to migrate, the wanderers went to whatever place seemed attractive, and only individuals or small groups decided to make the land of Israel their home. The choice by the exiles to go to other lands did not engender any sense of guilt. The great promises of the future were God's mystery, which He would reveal in His own time. Practically, the land of Israel in its current state did not prove economically tempting and it involved both dangers of travel and hardships of sojourn. The hope was a religious value, and that was it.

In the nineteenth century, when the hold of religion was slipping and many were relinquishing its practices, the process was accelerated by the opportunities that Jews were gaining to involve themselves in the life and activities of the countries wherein they lived. Following the bestowal of citizenship on them, or at least of civil rights, they immersed themselves fervently in various industries and trades, in schools of higher education, and in the politics of the land. The process of abandoning Jewish religious practices continued, and with it a growing skepticism about their beliefs and hopes.

Some individuals were sufficiently disturbed by these developments to sense that a real danger to Judaism was a possibility and plans were formulated to meet it. A religious program started, with the concession that the observance of practices was of secondary importance, since they are a reflection of the time when they were instituted. Changed times necessarily affect their cogency; it is the eternal verities that are significant. Spokesmen who took this position, happy with their new status, formally eliminated from their prayers and conduct everything suggestive of the hope of return to the Holy Land. Others reasoned that, in view of the decline of religious interest, the step to take was to isolate the hopes for a political and territorial solution from the creed in which they were imbedded, and to promote them under the rubric of nationalism, a concept which came into fashion in the 19th century. This proposal generated movements which involved either the establishment of a Jewish homeland somewhere in the world, other than the land of Israel, or demanded the recognition and treatment of the Jewish group within the citizenry of the country as a national minority with the right of fostering its own language, its education, and its cultural and religious institutions.

The most successful of these movements was Zionism. Converting the belief in divine restoration of the people to the land of Israel into a program of action, it undertook to have those who were interested work towards this objective. It preached the return to the country, the purchase of land in it and resettlement on it, the development of industry, and its establishment as the legally recognized home of the Jews. Orthodox Jews opposed the program, which, in their judgment, was contrary to God's will. Yet the movement gained many associates and numerous sympathizers. Of these, it was a relative few who settled in Palestine, adopted

Hebrew as their vernacular, set up an education-system and formed a kind of internal administration which was officially recognized by the ruling authority. Following several riots against the Jews by the Arabs, the Peel Commission in 1936 proposed partition of the country as the best way to settle the dispute between the claimants. After the Second World War and the irreparable loss to Jewry of about 6 million people destroyed by the Nazi regime in Germany, a fearful problem of displaced persons faced the western world. Palestine's Jewish leaders became restive and hostile in reaction to Britain's obstinate refusal to let those homeless enter Palestine, and they demanded recognition as an independent state. Their rule over part of the country was granted in 1947. Since then, large numbers of displaced Jews from Europe and from Moslem lands have increased the Jewish population there, so that it is now over three million.

However, the success of Zionism has also brought to light an undeniable truth. The transfer of habitat from one land to another does not automatically produce an inner transformation. The earlier settlers who, in part, came resolved to effect changes in their behavior as well as in their attitudes, turned to agriculture and to manual labor when they arrived, proceeded to set up collective settlements and earnestly sought to reform themselves psychologically so as to slough off those traits of character which were the consequence of centuries of life as a rejected and hounded group. A decision of this nature could be implemented only voluntarily by the people who willed it, by those who came to live in the Jewish homeland with those changes in mind. But the flood of immigrants who arrived after 1948 were, generally, not interested in this inner transformation; they cannot even be spoken of as newcomers who came to Israel by choice. They were eager to achieve as quickly as possible the standards of living, the material goods and the comforts which members of the middle class in western Europe and in America were enjoying. The ideals of the earlier settlers did not become the guidelines even of many of their children, let alone of the rest of the population.

Another, even more serious, consideration requires a prudent revision of our hopes and expectations. It appears quite obvious that the Zionist program, as outlined by its founders and theoreticians, was proposed as an application of nationalism, now lifted out of its religious context which was no longer a vital force in the life of most Jews. Apparently it was almost misunderstood by virtually all of its supporters. We are forced to recognize that the quip which was very popular before the Second World War gave utterance to a deep-seated difference from the doctrine of Zionism. "A Zionist is a Jew who collects money from another Jew to help a third one get to Palestine." From the inception, Zionists seem to have been persuaded that their program was a movement to help those who wanted and, more frequently, needed to go to the land of Israel. It was philanthropic in character. This is the motive behind the efforts of the Jews all over the world to help in the establishment of the State of Israel, to

raise large sums of money to help immigrants settle and make their way, to help the country in times of difficulties with its neighbors.

Evidently, the Jewish world is simply not ready to designate its identity as national. Jews regarded the hope of return to Israel as an inseparable tenet of their religion and, once they gave it up, in whole or in part, they no longer had the national aspect to believe in. Moreover, since they are almost everywhere citizens of another country, they neither feel it right, nor do they have the need, to regard themselves as nationals of another state. When we recall that the religiously inclined do not attach greater significance to this political tenet than to the other articles of faith, neither dogma making a great difference in their daily life, we grasp how revolutionary it would be on the part of Jews who are no longer fully identified with the faith to assert a Jewishness based on national identity. I recall that, on May 15, 1948, as the proclamation of the establishment of the State of Israel came over the radio, a well-known rabbi, who was one of the visitors in my home, commented: "I shall now have to join the Miz-rachi and leave the general Zionists, because as a religious Jew I can hold to my national hopes as part of my faith."

Many Jews may object to this admission. But their reluctance to do what the program sets forth, to move to the homeland, indicates that it is not a force in their life. The displacement of populations, which still continues and which impels or compels many Jews to move, follows the old pattern of going, or seeking to go, to the land of their choice but not to the State of Israel. Jews of the Soviet Union, whom the government allows to go out only to get to Israel because it recognizes the legitimacy of that desire, have not created a wave of immigration into the State of Israel. Large segments, after they reach a European capital, choose to turn elsewhere. The same thing is true of potential or actual emigrants from other countries. In a word, the Zionists, and other national Jewish programs, have operated with an illusion which most Jews have not made their own. Undoubtedly, a strong sense of relationship among Jews still exists, and a deep feeling of mutual responsibility, but it is really the declining momentum of the religious bond; declining because the rapid assimilation which eats into the body of the Jewish group reduces its force.

The implications of this state of affairs are ominous. We, in Israel, are fully aware that we are a small group, but our unspoken assumption that we are part of the Jewish people and that they will join us in the course of time has to be abandoned. In a sea of millions of hostile neighbors, the three million can hardly dare to hope for a glorious future for the state.



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The "Incomprehensibility" of the Holocaust: Tightening Up Some Loose Usage

DAN MAGURSHAK

AS SCHOLARSHIP CONCERNING THE DESTRUCTION of European Jewry accelerates, articulate survivors and some well-informed scholars remind the researchers that, as an event which demands serious investigation, the Holocaust may be, nonetheless, uniquely incomprehensible. Nora Levin writes:

The Holocaust refuses to go the way of most history, not only because of the magnitude of the destruction . . . but because events surrounding it are still in a very real sense humanly incomprehensible. . . . Indeed, comprehensibility may never be possible.¹

In the same vein Elie Wiesel asserts that "Auschwitz cannot be explained . . ." because " . . . the Holocaust transcends history." Emphasizing his point, he soberly adds, "The dead are in possession of a secret that we, the living, are neither worthy of nor capable of recovering."² If Holocaust scholars accept these statements about the incomprehensibility, the inexplicability, and the historical transcendence of their subject matter as true, they find themselves in the bind of secular Aquinases. Committed to complete understanding and explication of an inexplicable, they can hope only to make the darkness a little brighter. Convinced that the horror of systematic genocide must be comprehended, they must still admit that their subject, like Thomas' Trinity, is theoretically incomprehensible in principle.

As Levin and Wiesel use the notion, incomprehensibility, at the very least, means the impossibility of understanding fully and adequately the "jointly sufficient," or the necessary, conditions for the Holocaust's occurrence. It means that even after ideally exhaustive historical, psychological, and sociological analyses, the researchers would still have failed to penetrate the essence of this event. It also implies that, since control and prevention of such outrages presuppose some understanding of their essential components, a generation whose scholars remember the past may, because of its incomprehensibility, still be doomed to repeat it. Indeed, some would-be investigators might even conclude that, since a

1. Nora Levin, *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-1945* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), p. xi.

2. Elie Wiesel, "Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction," *The New York Times*, April 16, 1978, section 2, p. 29.

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“historically transcendent” phenomenon is inexplicable, scholarly “remembrance,” except for honoring the dead, is rather fruitless.

If the Holocaust is humanly incomprehensible, then the incentive to study the phenomenon, the commitment to spreading an awareness of it beyond academic circles, and the ability to prevent a similar occurrence are seriously diminished. And, since these implications are not inconsequential for humankind’s appropriation of the past in constructive self-knowledge, I intend to examine this notion of incomprehensibility to show in what legitimate sense the Holocaust may be considered incomprehensible. Distinguishing the various important meaning-variations of this term one from another, I suggest that, except in the case of “affective comprehension” and for the “theological” and religiously neutral “cosmic” ways of asking why the Holocaust occurred, the Holocaust is, in principle, as comprehensible and as amenable to disciplined study as any complex human phenomenon. And where it is incomprehensible I suggest that it is not uniquely so.

I. The Holocaust as Incomprehensible

A. “Wholistic” and Empathetic Incomprehensibility.

In standard usage, to comprehend is “to grasp with the mind, conceive fully or adequately, understand, ‘take in’.”³ To call an event “incomprehensible,” then, is to assert that one cannot fully or adequately understand it; in this sense, one may find modern physics incomprehensible. There is, however, an extended use of this term not unfamiliar to students of the Holocaust. After watching *Night and Fog*, listening to a survivor soberly recalling an “average” day in Auschwitz, or reading Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, one is often overwhelmed as an affective, intelligent, and articulate being. Consider the following passage from *Night*:

Not far from us, flames were leaping up from a ditch, gigantic flames. They were burning something. A lorry drew up at the pit and delivered its load — little children. Babies! Yes, I saw it with my own eyes . . . those children in the flames. (Is it surprising that I could not sleep after that? Sleep had fled from my eyes.)⁴

Having entered the kingdom of darkness through such testimony, one seems to collapse; a benumbed mind is unable to reflect as one dumbfoundedly sits in a silent unreality. A mixture of moral outrage, frustration and profound sorrow churns in the pit of one’s stomach. One is unable to speak, one does not know how to respond to children burning alive for the sake of saving two fifths of a pfenning on poison gas. The occurrence is “unimaginable,” “unbelievable,” “incomprehensible.” And even after one has analyzed such an atrocity historically, psychologically, and from other perspectives, a rereading of the account can plunge one

3. *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), Vol. II, p. 741.

4. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, tr. Stella Rodway (New York: Avon Books, 1960), p. 42.

back into the same experience. Somehow, the fact of burning children is irreducible to a complete explanation.

Nonetheless, the terms used in this context do not assert that this typical Holocaust atrocity is actually beyond the bounds of human imagination, unworthy of epistemic belief, or unintelligible in principle. They simply express a sense of being completely overwhelmed, a sense which is not unique to the horror of the Holocaust either in its occurrence or in its reoccurrence after explanations of the horrifying event have been given. One can, in fact, have the same experience with beauty.

Take, for example, the comparatively trivial phenomenon of a sunset. The explanation of this occurrence is quite complete; the earth orbiting around the sun and rotating on its axis has an atmosphere of a certain composition which refracts and diffuses light rays in ways determined by the angle of incidence and other physical considerations. Even the human interest in the sun is fairly explicable; we are a diurnal species whose survival depends upon the light, heat and relative position of this star. In spite of such comprehension, however, we are still overwhelmed by a sunset and we still call it "mysterious" or "unbelievably beautiful" to express our aesthetic wonder. Such expressions do not assert that a sunset is theoretically impenetrable, since we already understand it; they simply call attention to two different human modes of encountering the phenomenon, modes (a theoretical one and an affective or aesthetic one) whose relation to one another and whose relative importance to human beings are still much debated. Analogously, an investigator can comprehend rather completely the course of political, social, and economic events which led to modern German anti-Semitism and to the adoption of a policy which exterminated the Jew like vermin. Yet, when s/he rereads the passage quoted above, s/he may still numbly ask how it could have happened. From a perspective importantly similar to that in which one experiences the majesty of a sunset, the Holocaust as a totality and in its particular atrocities may be called "incomprehensible." Such incomprehensibility, however, does not entail the conclusion that the Holocaust is theoretically incomprehensible, i.e., an impenetrable mystery which remains in principle beyond the grasp of human understanding. Like other instances of overpowering beauty or horror, it is overwhelming without necessarily being incomprehensible. One may still conceive of it adequately, understand it, "take it in."

One can also speak of the incomprehensibility of the Holocaust in a related but narrower sense when one notes the difficulty which a sympathetic non-participant might have in empathizing with survivors. As Wiesel asserts, "Only those who were there know what it was; the others will never know."⁵ Levin concurs when she writes:

Ordinary human beings simply cannot rethink themselves into such a world and ordinary ways to achieve empathy fail, for all of the recognizable

5. Wiesel, "Trivializing the Holocaust," p. 29.

attributes of human reaction are balked at the Nazi divide; the world of Auschwitz was, in truth, a new planet.⁶

Both writers state that even sympathetic readers are unable to identify intellectually or to experience vicariously the feelings, thoughts and attitudes of the victims. And anyone who has read Holocaust literature extensively would have no difficulty extending this claim to the experiences of the executioners and the bystanders as well. When one reads about Warsaw Christians apparently enjoying the infernal spectacle of the Ghetto's destruction on Easter Sunday, one finds it sickeningly difficult to empathize with these spectators, some of whom were more than willing to call the Nazis' attention to burning people as they leapt from the blazing buildings.⁷ Nor can one easily "think oneself back" to experience the world as did Eichmann in Vienna. If the term "incomprehensible" refers to this overtaking of one's capacity for empathy, then, perhaps, the Holocaust is incomprehensible.

Upon careful consideration, however, one sees that such incomprehensibility is again neither unique to the Holocaust nor unquestionably absolute. For example, no matter how much one reads about men in battle or steep oneself in war films and documentaries, one still remains an observer rather than a participant if one has never been in combat. Even if one successfully empathizes with the young soldier in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, one still has not lived that experience which belongs to the veteran. Given any possible experience, one who has lived through it has, in some sense, a jump on those who have experienced it only vicariously, at least in terms of "knowing" what that experience is like. Of course Wiesel and Levin assert that one cannot even empathize with the people of the Holocaust, that a gulf exists between one's total experience and that of the survivors which makes it nearly impossible to experience even vicariously the world of gas chambers and incinerators. The same thing might be said, however, of the attempt to empathize with a combat soldier if one lacks any experience of a combat situation. At first, both kinds of experience are relatively incomprehensible; but as one begins to identify feelings, attitudes, and thoughts in one's own experience which appear analogous to those described by soldiers, inmates, or S.S. guards, one may piece together a fairly accurate sense of what it must have been like to live through some aspects of battle or some episodes of the Holocaust. For example, a person who has been subject to military induction or some other impersonal processing might well imagine what deportation might have been like. And if one is honest about one's own feelings of prejudice, one might begin to understand how such emotions, combined with the proper circumstances and ideology, could become murderous. The more

6. Levin, p. xii.

7. Alexander Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978), pp. 152-153.

one reflects upon and analyzes the experiences in question, the more one is able to explore that "new planet" which first seemed inaccessible to "ordinary people." The difference between the experiences of a participant and a spectator is undeniable; nonetheless, the initial inability to empathize with the Holocaust people may be overcome asymptotically as one studies, reflects, and steep oneself in the vivid testimony of that time. It is, after all, precisely one of the functions of literature and film to allow us to enter into a new world and to experience it as if we had lived through it ourselves.

B. Theoretical Incomprehensibility.

In addition to speaking about the "wholistic" and empathetic incomprehensibility of the Holocaust, one can also refer to its "cosmic" incomprehensibility.⁸ That is, when one asks the theoretical question, "Why did, or how could, the Holocaust occur?" From either a theological or religiously neutral perspective, one can offer no empirically verifiable answer. As is the case with any event, one cannot fully grasp or adequately understand why God would let such an atrocity occur or why the cosmos is such that it could have happened.

Believers in Israel's God of history or in the Christian God of the resurrection have often asked how God — omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent — could let the children burn under the blue and empty sky. The event demands a rethinking of speculations about God's nature, its relationship to humankind, the plausibility of its existence, and its purpose in at least allowing, if not willing, such carnage. Whether it is proper or not, some troubled believers, in Berkowitz's words, would like "... to steal a glance at 'the hand' of the Almighty in order to be able to appreciate what meaning the senseless destruction of European Israel might have in the divine scheme."⁹ But, given the nature of theological questions, no complete and totally satisfying answers will be forthcoming; at best, believers can hope only for disciplined speculation consistent with a certain set of theological assertions perhaps rationally supported and made within a context of a particular faith. And if theologians accept Irving Greenberg's injunction not to present any insights which would mock the reality of the burning children, they are constantly reminded of the difficulty of reconciling traditional notions of God with the technological mass murder of the chosen people.¹⁰ In the context of traditional theistic theology, the Holocaust seems theoretically incomprehensible; as such, however, it is only another case of theological puzzlement familiar to every theologian,

8. The notion of cosmic questions, with its distinction between theological and ultimate questions, is used by Paul Edwards in his article, "Why," in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 8, pp. 296-302.

9. Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1973), p. 69.

10. Irving Greenberg, "Clouds of Smoke, Pillars of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity After the Holocaust," in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* ed. Eva Fleischer (New York: KTAV, 1977), pp. 23, 26, and 34.

a case not unlike that of the Lisbon earthquake which dominated philosophical theology for a century. The problem of evil and the purposes of the intelligent God of theism have always taxed human comprehension.

A similar incomprehensibility appears when one asks the "ultimate" cosmic questions. Paul Edwards correctly observes that "... when we ask of anything, x, why it happened or why it is what it is ... we assume that there is something or some set of conditions, other than x, in terms of which it can be explained."¹¹ But once one has investigated the historical, socio-economic, and psychological conditions which made the Holocaust possible, one often has a not uncommon tendency to ask why the universe could not have been such that a technologically simplified program of genocide would have been impossible. Could there not have been a universe with all of the advantages of this one but with none of its disadvantages, particularly moral evil? If confronted with a theological response to this question, the inquirer could simply ask why the God that does exist should exist, rather than another. The question is ultimate insofar as the questioner accepts no set of conditions as an adequate response; s/he simply asks why these conditions, rather than others, should obtain and, therefore, rules out, a priori, any answer to the inquiry. If this is the case, then the Holocaust is also "ultimately" incomprehensible, but no more so than any event in human or natural history. Any time one presses an inquiry to the ultimate "why," one places oneself within a realm where self-consistent speculation lacking cogency and compellingness is all that one can achieve. For some thinkers, unanswerable ultimate questions are, in some sense, the most meaningful and most important inquiries; hence, to say that the Holocaust is incomprehensible in this sense is, for them, to say that, in the way that really matters the event is, indeed, an impenetrable mystery. But this means only that the destruction of European Jewry, like any event in the cosmos, is not "ultimately" explicable.

II. *The Holocaust as Comprehensible*

Once one has noted that confronting the Holocaust is overwhelming, empathetically taxing, and both theologically and ultimately incomprehensible, one is free to investigate it simply as a tragic but, nonetheless, human phenomenon. One can take the general question, "Why, or how, did the Holocaust occur?" and break it down to the following concerns:

1. How was it possible for a modern state to carry out the systematic murder of a whole people for no other reason than that they were Jews?
2. How was it possible for a whole people to allow itself to be destroyed?
3. How was it possible for a world to stand by without halting this destruction?¹²

11. Edwards, p. 301.

12. Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Bantam Books Inc., 1976), p. xxi.

And, in asking these questions, one assumes that one can discover the jointly sufficient or the necessary conditions — depending upon one's theory of explanation — which make aspects of the phenomenon intelligible. One expects that the event will yield to the analytical efforts of the various disciplines, and nothing that has been said about its incomprehensibility entails a contrary expectation. At present the Holocaust may be, in large measure, uncomprehended, but this in no way entails or even plausibly suggests that disciplined study is incapable of comprehending it. There is no good reason to deny that careful, exhaustive, historical, cultural, and psychological studies will not, at least ideally, yield a complete and coherent account which traces the course of events and the play of factors by which the atrocity came about. Like any event of similar magnitude, the mass annihilation of Jews, Gypsies, and other enemies of the Reich rests upon a complex foundation of conditions which may never be completely excavated because of time limitations, lack of information, and a dearth of investigative insights; nonetheless, the investigator aims at an ideal completeness which indicates at least the possibility that more time, more information, and new theories will gradually diminish the relative incomprehensibility of this event. One can see the plausibility of this approach in a brief summary of two analyses, one historical and the other psychological, which makes partially intelligible what some thinkers might have once relegated to the realm of impenetrable mystery.

Breaking down the first question quoted above, one can ask how anti-Semitism in modern Germany developed; more importantly, one might ask how anti-Semitism became politically acceptable. In the second chapter of *The War Against the Jews*,¹³ Lucy Dawidowicz sheds a good deal of light upon the conditions which made this acceptance possible. As she explains it, the German peoples of the Nineteenth Century inherited a Christian-inspired popular and intellectual anti-Semitism which depicted Jews as foreigners — a state within a state — killers of Christ, well-poisoners, and the cause of every misfortune, whether natural, economic, or political. The forces of nationalism, *Volkist* theory, bogus racial science, and fear of modernity reinforced and built upon this foundation. The religious outcast and transmitter of plague now became politically dangerous, a threat to national unity, a defiler of the transcendental essence of the German peoples, and the capitalistic cause of the urbanism and industrialism which threatened the peasant, the small merchant, and the *Volkist* ideal of the simple life rooted in the soil of the homeland. Involved in the expanding money economy, the Jews became the scapegoat for the depression of 1873. Soon, politicians campaigned on explicit anti-Semitic platforms and, in 1887, a man named Böckel was elected to the Reichstag by a peasant constituency which agreed with his message that Jews were, by nature, alien to Germany. In 1892, the Con-

13. Ibid., pp. 29-62.

servative Party, the most prestigious party of its day, adopted an explicit anti-Semitic plank. In this account, Dawidowicz weaves the various forces and influences into a coherent narrative which allows one to comprehend how an important segment of the German voting population could live with, and support in good conscience, the apparently self-evident truth that the Jew was, and always would be, a troublemaking, alien inferior. She also helps one to understand that when such an unquestioned assumption was reinforced by intellectuals, "scientists," and politicians, an upstanding German might consider himself bound to seek a "final solution" of some sort to the "Jewish question." On the basis of this account, one can comprehend, perhaps with a shudder, how insidiously subtle and unnoticed the development of a catastrophe might be, particularly for those involved in it.

But once the murder began, how could an upstanding German participate in any of its phases? Stanley Milgram's by now classic experiments on obedience to authority contribute much to comprehending this aspect of the general question, an aspect which initially strained the understanding of both lay people and social scientists.

Milgram introduces his investigation by placing it in the following context:

... from 1933 to 1945 millions of innocent people were systematically slaughtered on command. Gas chambers were built, death camps were guarded, daily quotas of corpses were produced with the same efficiency as the manufacture of appliances. These inhumane policies may have originated in the mind of a single person, but they could only have been carried out on a massive scale if a very large number of people obeyed orders.¹⁴

In order to find out whether or not ordinary people would act against their own moral standards in obeying the commands of one preceived as a legitimate authority, Milgram devised an experimental situation in which the subject agreed to perform a task which, s/he believed, inflicted pain upon another person whenever the latter failed to respond correctly. Milgram's findings were as follows:

It is the extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority that constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation. . . . [O]rdinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.¹⁵

Milgram explains these phenomena in terms of antecedent conditions, the nature of the "agentic state," and the factors which bind one to

14. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. 1.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

submissive obedience. According to him, human beings manifest a tendency to obey which functions adaptively in communal life and which all types of social groups strongly reinforce. One develops a habit of obedience to authority and although one may intellectually decide not to obey a particular order in a situation like Milgram's experiment, one is "... frequently unable to transform this conviction into action."¹⁶ One is tightly bound to the task by the recurrent nature of the action (to quit now is to admit that it was wrong to do up until now), the initial agreement with the experimenter, and anticipated embarrassment of breaking up a well-defined social situation. Furthermore, one sees the entire project with reference to one's relationship to the experimenter; wishing to perform competently, one attends to instruction, focuses almost exclusively on the authority while tuning out the victim, and endows the authority with an almost superhuman character. One also tends to accept the definition and interpretation of the situation provided by authority, e.g., that this experiment is a noble pursuit of knowledge. But, perhaps most importantly, once a person submits him/herself to authority, then a superego function shift occurs; that is,

... a man feels responsible *to* the authority directing him but feels no responsibility *for* the content of the actions that the authority prescribes. Morality does not disappear, but acquires a radically different focus: the subordinate person feels shame or pride depending on how adequately he has performed the actions called for by authority.¹⁷

Milgram's findings apply to people acting in a freely accepted situation. When conditions such as a totalitarian state, the dehumanization of the victim, and the threat of capital punishment for disobedience are added, then one comprehends even better how decent people could participate in the task of mass murder.

Neither Milgram nor Dawidowicz answers all questions about the respective problems, but such incompleteness is neither absolute nor unique; given access to all relevant information, an investigator can, at least in principle, fill in the picture up to the boundaries of the cosmic questions already discussed. Practically speaking, the Holocaust, like the French Revolution, the Second World War, or any complex human phenomenon provides the various disciplines with an almost endless field of investigation which is, nonetheless, always open to further comprehension.

III. Conclusion

The argument of this paper has not intended to minimize the overwhelming importance of the mass murder of six million Jews, five hundred thousand Gypsies, and millions of other people. It denies

16. Ibid., p. 148.

17. Ibid., pp. 145-146.

neither the awesome horror of this event nor the harsh challenge with which it confronts the contemporary generation of scholars and thoughtful laypersons. It simply clarifies the senses in which the Holocaust may be properly called incomprehensible and, thus, clears the way for the unimpeded investigation of this event. The calculated extermination of human beings, pursued for its own sake, must not be forgotten, but neither should it only be remembered; it must be critically and compassionately analyzed, explained, and comprehended. Only in this way might the fires of Auschwitz "... illumine otherwise dark corners of our moral landscape, making us aware of present acts of human demonry we would not otherwise see."¹⁸ Through the study of the Holocaust, human beings can gain a brutally harsh knowledge of their capabilities and tendencies, a self-knowledge which is a necessary condition for the prevention of the actualization of their worst possibilities.

18. Robert McAfee Brown, "The Holocaust as a Problem in Moral Choice," in *Dimensions of the Holocaust* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977), p. 62.

The Jews of Spain and Provence in the Middle Ages

Les Juifs à la fin du Moyen Age dans l'Europe méditerranéenne. By MAURICE KRIEGLER. Paris. Hachette, 1979. 282 pp.

Reviewed by EDOUARD RODITI

ALTHOUGH FRANCE now has the world's fourth largest Jewish community, outstandingly scholarly works on Jewish themes are none too frequently written or published in French. The recent appearance of Maurice Kriegel's *Les Juifs à la fin du Moyen Age dans l'Europe méditerranéenne* (The Jews in the late Middle Ages in Mediterranean Europe) is, therefore, of considerable importance, especially as its publisher enjoys almost a monopoly of book distribution in France. In the French press, Kriegel's book is thus receiving the same kind of acclaim as some of the many recent and very popular French novels on Jewish themes, such as those of Patrick Modiano, who, in 1978, was awarded the annual Goncourt Prize for fiction.

After obtaining his doctorate at the Paris Ecole des Hautes Etudes with a brilliant dissertation on the expulsion of the Jews from the areas ruled by the Kings of Aragon, Maurice Kriegel now teaches medieval Jewish history at the University of Haifa. His book is, in a way, an expanded version of his dissertation, covering a broader geographical area and a more extended period in time. Its title, however, is perhaps misleading: he concerns himself here with the history of the Jews of Spain and of neighboring areas of Provence in Southern France, without discussing the history of the Jews, during the same period, in other and

equally important Mediterranean areas such as North Africa, Italy, Egypt and those provinces of the former Roman Empire in the Near East that were then ruled by the Byzantine Emperors, by the Turks or by the Arab Caliphs.

Kriegel's detailed analysis of the demographic, economic, social and cultural evolution of Sefardic Jewry in the Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth centuries is divided into six main chapters: the Jews as a repressed or "alien" minority that enjoyed limited and precarious rights, the political and economic exploitation of this minority, its economic function as a caste mainly engaged in promoting the circulation of credit and goods, the paternalistic "nomocracy" or rule of law within the Jewish communities, the failure of the rationalist movement in Jewish philosophy and science, and, finally, the assimilation or the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and from all of Provence except the area of Avignon and the so-called *Comtat Venaisin* that was still ruled by the Pope.

Each one of these chapters proves, in turn, to be a tightly woven tissue of facts drawn from a surprisingly wide range of sources, so that the critical appendix alone, at the end of the book, fills almost fifty pages. Much of the material that Kriegel quotes is indeed so fascinating that one often wishes he had developed and explained it more extensively. In his third chapter, devoted to the economic life of the Sefardic Jewish communities, he points out, for instance, that for a while, in the Thirteenth century, the Jews of Provence, Catalonia and the Balearic isles, in particular, played a dominant role in Western-European trade with North Africa and even, across the Sahara, with the gold-producing

coastal areas of the Gulf of Guinea, so that they supplied the mints of Western Europe with much of their gold. In the Fourteenth century, the Kings of Aragon therefore encouraged large numbers of Jewish traders from North Africa to settle with their families in their territories, above all in Majorca, by granting them privileges that were not enjoyed by native Spanish Jews. In the Fifteenth century, when the Jewish communities of Spain were subjected to increasingly frequent and violent pogroms or local expulsion orders, the descendants of many of the North-African Jews still maintained such close contacts with communities in the Maghreb that they began to emigrate back to North Africa. Some of them even spoke Arabic so fluently that they were able to escape from pogroms in Navarre, and subsequent arrest in Southern Spain, by claiming to be Mohammedans and proving it by reciting Moslem prayers quite faultlessly. In this context, Kriegel might usefully have explained at greater length that the expert knowledge of some Majorcan Jews in ship-building, the making of navigational instruments, astronomy, navigation by the stars and map-making was so great that a few of their descendants, such as Jafuda Cresquez, a convert to Catholicism, emigrated later to Portugal, and were able to play a decisive part in Portugal's acquisition of mastery of the seas, right up to the age of Magellan.

Kriegel might likewise have consulted, in the Archives of the Indies in Seville, the files of the Inquisition in Tangier, where some Jewish families, which had accepted baptism in Spain but then emigrated to North Africa out of fear of persecution as Marranos, later applied in the Sixteenth century for permission to return to Spain or Portugal as Christians who had successfully passed the Inqui-

tion's tests. The economic role of refugees from Spain and Portugal in North Africa indeed continued well into the Sixteenth century to be extremely important. The Spanish and Portuguese fleets thus relied for a long while on Jewish traders in Ceuta, Tangier and Azemour, in order to obtain most of the wheat for their stores of ship's biscuit. Numerous documents in Lisbon's national Torre do Tombo archives and in Seville's Archives of the Indies prove that expeditions such as those of Columbus and Magellan set out from Spain or Portugal with a store of ship's biscuit made from wheat purchased in Morocco through Jewish intermediaries. Some Arabic sources might moreover have provided Kriegel with more detailed information about the "warrior Jews" of the caravans that engaged in the gold trade across the Sahara.

On the mysterious but still controversial subject of the "Jewish Kings" who are reputed to have claimed, in Narbonne, to be descendants of the House of David through Makhir, whom the Emperor Charlemagne is presumed to have invited, under an agreement with Haroun-al-Rashid, to come from Baghdad in order to rule over the Jewish communities of Provence, a curious reader might welcome more ample information about the power or prestige that these Kings or their descendants appear, according to Kriegel, to have still enjoyed, if only locally, until at least the end of the Thirteenth century. A full-length study of this monarchy has been published by Arthur J. Zuckerman: *A Jewish Principdom in Feudal France, 768-900* (Columbia University Press, 1972). Jeremy Cohen subsequently questioned the real historical existence of this monarchy, however, in an extensive critique in a recent volume of the *Annual Association of Jewish Studies*. Even if the

Jewish Princes of Narbonne derived their dubious authority from a merely legendary Act of Charlemagne, it would still be interesting to elucidate the real sources of so nostalgic a tradition of Jewish royalty. Might it not have been inspired, to some extent, by knowledge of the existence of the Jewish Khanate of the Chazars in Southern Russia or of the Kingdom of the Jewish "rajahs" of Cranganore on the Malabar Coast of India? Surprisingly as it now may seem, some knowledge of the existence of both these monarchies was available to the Jews of Spain and Provence through the reports of both Arab and Jewish travelers.

Reviews in the French press have generally concentrated their attention on the last chapter of Kriegel's book, where he argues very convincingly that the Jewish communities of Spain and Provence had been so impoverished by pogroms and numerically reduced by earlier emigration and by voluntary or forced conversions, by the end of the Fifteenth century, that the expulsion of their hard core was no longer of major economic or demographic significance. Here he quotes some official Spanish inventories of pathetically penurious stores of goods and chattels confiscated from, or abandoned by, Jews who left hurriedly at the time of the final expulsion. But Kriegel's explanation of this phenomenon of economic impoverishment and demographic attrition in previous chapters, especially in the one devoted to rationalist Jewish philosophy and science, and to the Cabalist reaction to these, has tended to be neglected by most French reviewers. Yet this chapter remains, in many respects, Kriegel's most original contribution towards a better understanding of the intellectual, spiritual and demographic attrition of Sefardic Jewry. He points out, for instance, that the main cen-

ter of Jewish activity in rationalist philosophy and the sciences was Provence, rather than Spain. An emigrant from the Arab kingdom of Granada, Judah ibn Tibbon, thus established in the Twelfth-century in Lunel, in Southern France, a veritable dynasty of rational philosophers, commentators on Maimonides and translators of Arabic philosophical and scientific texts into Hebrew. Some of these translators even worked in collaboration with Christian scholars in order to translate Averroist texts, by means of Provençal as a convenient intermediate language, from Arabic into Latin, or other texts from Hebrew into Latin. In the sciences, these Jewish scholars concentrated their attention on mathematical, astronomical, medical and pharmaceutical treatises. Through their close cooperation with Christian scholars, they thus contributed usefully towards the development of the Universities of Paris and of Montpellier as international centres of learning.

But their respect for Islamic scholarship and their close cooperation with Christian colleagues often led, according to Kriegel, to their loss of faith in many of the basic tenets of orthodox Judaism and to an individualistic or elitist acceptance of the idea that some Gentile interpretations of the Old Testament, such as the Averroist rejection of the description of the Creation of the World in the opening chapter of Genesis, might be more truthful. Kriegel thus points out that Jacob Anatoli, a Jewish scholar who conducted his studies in Naples in collaboration with Michael Scot, a Christian, accepted many of the latter's interpretations of Scripture on the grounds that they might be more correct than those of orthodox Jewish exegetes, since the value of a truth need not depend on the religion of the scholar who proposes it.

With a considerable amount of historical evidence concerning the use of rationalist Jewish converts to Catholicism in the public disputations organized by the Church and in which orthodox Jewish scholars, such as Nahmanides on one occasion, were forced to defend Judaism against insuperable odds, Kriegel argues that the sceptical or critical attitude of Jewish rationalists tended, on the one hand, to lead in time to many conversions to Christianity and also, on the other hand, to a popular and less elitist reaction among devout Jews in favor of Cabbalah. He adds, however, that some Cabbalists, such as the anonymous Fifteenth-century author of the *Sefer Haqanah* and the *Sefer Hapliah*, may at first sight appear to have been in league with the rationalists, when they likewise ridicule traditional Talmudic exegesis by pointing out the apparent absurdity of some dietary laws, such as the prohibition of the use of dairy products in the cooking of fowl, which are not mammals, but not in the cooking of fish. Kriegel might usefully have suggested here that such arguments may have been an unconscious legacy of Karaitism, which is known to have penetrated the Maghreb and Spain from Mesopotamia in the much earlier period of Arab conquest and settlement.

On the subject of the above-mentioned highly publicized disputations between the Church and the Synagogue that the mendicant orders of monks staged mainly in Catalonia, Aragon and Provence, and in which Jewish scholars were forced to participate under very unfair circumstances in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries, Kriegel neglects to mention the Provençal *Breviari de amor*, a monumental poetic encyclopedia, in one section of which the author, Matfre Ermengaut, offers a version in verse, with Hebrew chapter-

headings derived from the Talmud in most of the older manuscripts, of a disputation which he appears to have witnessed, towards the end of the Thirteenth century, in Narbonne, Montpellier or Béziers.

From the point of view of scholarship in the field of medieval hermeneutics, one of the most controversial passages in Kriegel's very stimulating book may well be a brief paragraph, in his chapter on the failure of rationalist philosophy and the popular Cabbalist reaction to it, where he quotes the Zohar's insistence that Scripture be interpreted literally (*pshat*), allegorically (*remez*), homiletically or metaphorically in the tradition of Haggadah (*drash*) and mystically or anagogically (*sod*). Kriegel suggests without any further ado that these four levels of interpretation are "probably derived . . . from Christian sources." It is a pity that he has not been more explicit. The fact that Moses de Leon, the author of the *Zohar*, should already be proposing exactly the same four methods of interpretation as Dante did later, in his famous letter to Can Grande della Scala, would certainly deserve more ample research into the origins and history of this tradition of hermeneutics, which can in any case be traced back as far as the much earlier *Mishnah Hagigah*, if not even earlier to Philo Judaeus and some Pre-Christian Neoplatonists of Alexandria. In Jewish tradition, of course, the order of these four levels of interpretation is not the same as in Dante's letter: whereas the initial consonants of the four Hebrew words *pshat*, *remez*, *drash* and *sod* add up to *pardes*, the traditional term for this method of interpretation of Scripture, Dante lists his four levels as literal, metaphorical, allegorical and anagogical.

Be that all as it may, Kriegel's book has exemplary value as a work of scholarship that should still in-

spire, in years to come and, above all, among French and Spanish historians, much further research and interpretation of a more detailed nature (in areas where Kriegel contents himself, for the time being, with the finding and presenting of neglected historical data) which can lead to a new evaluation of the social, economic and intellectual evolution of Spain and Southern France in the late Middle Ages. The conclusion of Kriegel's chapter on rationalist philosophy and the Cabbalah thus states briefly that "the expulsion from Spain tolled the death-knell of philosophy" in Sefardic Jewry. However brief and perfunctory, this statement dovetails perfectly, of course, into Gershom Scholem's brilliant research on the popularity of Cabbalah in the Sefardic Diaspora in the Near East and North Africa, and on the popular appeal of the heresy of the false Messiah Shebtai Zwi. Kriegel had already pointed out that the anonymous author of the *Sefer Haqanah*, an orthodox Cabbalist, declares that only Jews deserve to be called human and pure, being descendants of Adam as a prototype, whereas all Gentiles are descended from an impure other Adam. Sexual intercourse with Gentiles would, therefore, be impure. Although this assertion can already be found in the Talmud, it was widely quoted and developed in later Cabbalist literature and even became an element of popular belief and practice among traditional Sefardic communities of the Maghreb and the Near East. When I visited two years ago the old Jewish cemetery in Fez, in Morocco, I was shown, far from all the other tombs, the area reserved for the burial of Jewish prostitutes who, I was told, are impure because of their relations with Gentiles. Reversing this whole dialectic much as Karl Marx later reversed that of Hegel, the followers of Shebtai Zwi

then adopted the opposite view — in fact, a belief in the sacredness of sin and of sexual relations with Gentiles — as a means of hastening the coming of the Messianic Age.

The data accumulated and presented by Kriegel in his truly monumental study seek above all to discredit two widespread and equally incorrect conceptions of the economic, social and intellectual history of Sefardic Jewry in medieval Spain. The first of these is the Nineteenth-century Romantic fallacy, illustrated at a lower level in the novels of Grace Aguilar and Benjamin Disraeli, as well as in some of the German or Dutch poems of Heinrich Heine or Isaac da Costa, according to which the Jews of medieval Spain "lived like grandees" and were never subjected to the same humiliating restrictions, dire persecutions and pogroms as those of the Ashkenazi world in England, Northern France or Germany. Kriegel thus quotes ample evidence of the precarious nature of the power sometimes enjoyed by a few Court Jews in Spain and of the vexatious pogroms and popular revolts, led by Dominican or Franciscan monks, against the protection accorded to Jewish communities in Spain by individual monarchs, by the aristocracy, by local bishops or by the Pope.

The second such misinterpretation of history is the equally idealistic theory of the great Spanish scholar, Americo Castro, and of a number of other eminent Spanish liberals, according to whom the felicitous *convivencia* or "living together" of Christian, Moslem and Jewish communities in medieval Spain later produced the peculiarly Hispanic character of Spain's Golden Age in the Renaissance. Although there were brief periods, for instance in Toledo under King Alfonso, of fruitful intellectual cooperation between Jew-

ish and Christian scholars and scientists, this kind of felicitous *convivencia* now proves, in the light of a long history of segregation, insecurity and persecution, to have been a rare exception rather than the rule. On the contrary, both the State and Church, throughout the Middle Ages, went to great lengths to segregate the Jews of Spain and to prevent them from exerting any overt influence on their Christian neighbors.

EDOUARD RODITI *has written extensively on Jews in the Middle Ages.*

In Transition — A Review of Four Books on Judaism Today

Understanding Conservative Judaism. By ROBERT GORDIS. Edited by Max Gelb. Volume II in *Studies in Conservative Jewish Thought*. New York. The Rabbinical Assembly, 1978.

Movements and Issues in American Judaism. Edited, and with an Introduction by BERNARD MARTIN. New York. Greenwood Press.

Ancient Roots and Modern Meanings. A Contemporary Reader in Jewish Identity. Edited by JERRY V. DILLER. New York. Bloch Publishing Co., 1978.

Unorthodox Judaism. By NORMAN B. MIRSKY. Columbus, Ohio. Ohio State University Press, 1978.

Reviewed by JACOB B. AGUS

THESE FOUR BOOKS illustrate the vitality and restlessness of modern Jewish thought. Gordis' many books and articles, of which this volume is a condensation, have articulated the main themes of American Conservatism for more than a generation. Martin's and Diller's works are anthologies, put together

from the sociological and counter-cultural viewpoints respectively. Mirsky's volume is a lucid analysis of some of the issues and developments in contemporary Judaism.

The Gordis volume was edited by Max Gelb, with the author adding clarifying sentences and generally updating the quotations from his earlier books. This work will be helpful to younger scholars, who may be expected to use it as a guide to the books and essays of one of the leading architects of the Conservative movement.

This reviewer feels that the dates of the various essays and additions in the volume should have been identified clearly. A great creative mind, such as Gordis', develops and expands in the course of five decades. It is better for the next generations of scholars to get the feel of the stream of thought, even in a collection of excerpts, than to be presented with a set of conclusions.

The volume opens with four brief letters, illustrating the author's role as a polemical path-breaker. He combats the approach of quantifying sociologists and of the mushrooming anti-intellectualists, after their several kinds. He describes *Halakhah* as a stream, not as an ancient edifice weathering the centuries, insisting that there is an alternative in thought, as in practice, to both the legalistic rigorism of the Orthodox and the "anarchy" of the Reform. He illustrates the Conservative ideology in the introduction to the Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book.

Written at different times and in reference to different issues, some statements appear inconsistent. Thus, in criticizing the early Reformers, he writes, "Reform Judaism used the rationalistic critique of religion to justify the dictates of convenience" (p. 22). "Convenience," then, is a bad excuse for

change. But in describing the causes of change in Rabbinic Judaism, he notes, "Another group of changes was the result of the feeling that practices hallowed in the past were inconvenient or out of harmony with new environmental conditions" (p. 28). The term, *convenience*, has become a code-word in the Orthodox critique of Conservatism. Naturally, there are different degrees and kinds of inconvenience — some which call for change in order to enhance human dignity — *K'vod hab'riyot* — and others, which betray a lack of seriousness.

Among the instances of "the surrender of ideas and practices," the author refers to the belief in Satan and the angels (p. 30). I wonder if the Hasidim have abandoned this belief, or if they now leave out the line in the prayer *Oleinu* which Gordis describes as being "no longer felt to be in harmony with the Jewish outlook" (p. 32).

In regard to the issue of riding to the Synagogue on Sabbath and holidays, the author concludes, "the decision is one which only the individual can make for himself" (p. 43). It is a pity that this point is not explained in greater detail, either in the way that it differs from the majority decision in the Responsum on the Sabbath (1950), or in the way that it differs from traditional Halakhah, where a rabbinic decision was always sought. Only the Karaites encouraged individuals to make their own decision in matters of law.

The author's valiant efforts to harmonize truths flowing from different sources are in evidence throughout the volume. He rejects the Reconstructionist approach to *mizvot* — "to declare Jewish observance a matter of folkways sounds the death-knell of Judaism as a normative religion" (p. 49). But in discussing the function of rituals, he lists, among others, their "es-

thetic or play functions" and their "national or Group-Associational values" (p. 77). He is guided by a sense of proportion and balance, as were the classicists of all ages. During his entire illustrious career, he has been concerned with the nature of Jewish identity. At times, he entered the lists against the secularists; at times against those who ignored the ethnic loyalties and sentiments of the Jewish people. His basic argument is "the recognition of Jewish uniqueness" (p. 105). Before the establishment of Israel, the global fellowship of Israel was unique in doing without a political-cultural center. After the establishment of Israel, this uniqueness is still an indubitable fact. Israel is "the old country" to American Jews, even to those who were never there, and, in a sense, Israelis are also living in *galut*. In the hearts and minds of Jewish people in Israel, as in America, he contends, the battle for a healthy sense of Jewish identity is still to be won.

The claim of "uniqueness" is useful in fending off cries for conformity in the fields of culture and politics. But, in a deeper sense, uniqueness is the mark of all historical groups. The basic question is one of values, not facts. Is uniqueness itself a source of values, even the supreme source of values? Gordis affirms his faith in formulae that rise above history — "beyond all else and subsuming all else, Judaism is a religion," and "we regard the Law, both Written and Oral, as the revelation of God" (p. 63). To him, then, the uniqueness of the Jewish people is a consequence of, and limited to, their covenantal bond with God.

In general, Gordis presents a Conservative philosophy, not *the* Conservative philosophy. The focus on historical development invites many different approaches. Innovations within the movement

take place, as a rule, only when several different philosophies converge in support of them.

Gordis describes himself as a liberal in the philosophic sense — “one who believes that all legitimate ends are compatible with one another” (p. 194). So, in his view, faith and reason, Jewishness and humanism, tradition and progress, Americanism and Zionism are all one at their source. In this book, nearly every page illustrates this faith. And it is a faith that our age, which beheld “the twilight of the gods,” each representing a fragmentary ideal, sorely needs if it is to confront with wisdom and courage the challenges of the future.

The title of the collection of essays edited by Martin promises more than it delivers. This volume contains surveys of Orthodoxy, Conservatism and Reform, of demographic trends and communal organizations, of developments in Jewish education and college-level courses, of anti-Semitism and Jewish-Christian relations, of intermarriage and the Canadian experience. Each essay is written by a different person, with no attempt to relate to the total scene. However, in the Introduction, the editor provides an Historical Overview which purports to bring the several pieces together into one perspective. Except for occasional glances at “issues,” basic questions of theology and ideology are mentioned only in passing, if at all.

In his introductory essay, Bernard Martin describes the postwar efflorescence of American Judaism, the remarkable increase in membership of Reform, Conservative and Modern Orthodox congregations. This massive and heartening phenomenon was “accompanied by a perceptible rise in personal religious observance” (p. 9). Reform Jews began to appreciate

the value of religious rituals. Nor was this resurgence devoid of an intellectual dimension. A plethora of books on Jewish thought came off the commercial presses.

Lest one might think that this revival was essentially religious in character, the author cites the view of Glazer, who attributed it to the effect of suburbanization and conformity to Gentile mores. Like other segments of American society, Jews are affected by conformist pressures, but, we submit, they are not shadowy creatures, reacting only through mimesis, blindly imitating their neighbors. They internalize the challenges of the day. We need another Shakespeare to remind our sociologists that Jews, too, have souls, spiritual hungers and religious longings, which ebb and flow in response to contemporary events.

More to the point, we are told that the anguish of the Holocaust and the exhilaration of Israel produced the American Jewish renaissance. Who can doubt the effect of these massive upheavals? But wind-storms extinguish little fires quickly enough, even while they fan big fires into vast conflagrations. There must have been the big fires of Jewish loyalty, in respect of faith as well as ethnicity, if the great catastrophe and, subsequently, the desperate and prolonged fight for a secure Israel produced so magnificent a response. There can be no talk of Israel causing directly the rebirth of religious life in the Diaspora, since the role of religion in Israel is of a totally different order, at least insofar as Conservative and Reform Jews are concerned.

Peering into the future, Dr. Martin suggests that we are entering a “post-Christian” era, with mainline denominations losing their hold upon the American people. In that case, he speculates, the Jews may follow suit, and proceed to define themselves, no longer as a religious

community, but as an ethnic enclave (p. 24). Here, indeed, is an issue worth pondering. Dr. Martin refers to it again in his discussion of Professor M.M. Kaplan's recognition "that Zionism is the substantive religion of many Jews" (p. 143). No one can foresee the future, but the mystique of *folkism*, with religion serving as the hand-maiden of a narcissistic ethnicism, is not a new, unknown quantity. Heavily laden with a bloody past, it should be viewed as a threat, not as a promise.

In his essay on the revival of the Orthodox community, Shubert Spero applies the Niebuhrian distinction between a church and a sect. The "church-wing" of Orthodoxy, centering around the Yeshiva University, accepts the secular order as one permeated with divinity. *Hokhmah* (wisdom) is essential to piety *yir'ah*. Hence, it is a collective obligation to work within the larger community and its values. The sect-wing of Orthodoxy is insular and separatist, rejecting *K'lal Yisroel*, even when it sends out "missionaries" to "convert" other Jews.

Conservative Judaism is treated at some length by the editor, a Reform scholar, though the other two movements are discussed by writers who identify with the movements they describe.

Dr. Martin refers to Solomon Schechter's "philosophy" of Judaism in quotation marks, as if it were not worthy of that designation. I trust it was a printer's error. Dr. Martin relies on Sklare's view of Conservative Judaism as a "failure" which did not succeed in the area of personal observance. Only 40% light candles on Friday night, according to some surveys (p. 125, 126). Furthermore, "one is hard-pressed to think of a single original or even consequential Jewish theological or philosophical thinker that the seminary itself has produced, apart from Mordecai

Kaplan and the late Milton Steinberg" (p. 132).

This judgment, unfair as it is, is taken to be a sign of the fuzziness of the movement as a whole. Dr. Martin forgets Hegel's observation — "the owl of Minerva spreads out its wings at dusk" — that is, philosophical contemplation flourishes after the creative and revolutionary events have had their day.

Dr. Michael A. Meyer discusses the Reform rabbinate. We learn that 28% are "agnostic or atheistic," but a considerable group follow the "existential" approach and affirm "the covenant between God and the Jewish people" (pp. 161, 162). Hence, a renewed interest in *Halakhah*, for "guidance, not governance." *Mitzvot* are not "divine commandments," (nor "standards" as in Conservatism,) but "options and opportunities." In respect of Zionism, a complete reversal took place in the Thirties, with the movement now preaching the value of *aliyah* (p. 166). The Association for Progressive Reform Judaism objects to making "the State of Israel the center of Jewish life" (p. 167). The new Prayer Book is virtually an anthology; recognizing the broad spectrum within the movement, it offers ten services for Sabbath eve, "ranging from the severely traditional to the explicitly human" (p. 168). Ethnicism has come to take the place of religion in the consciousness of many Reform laymen, with an increasing "Jewish distance" between laymen and their rabbis.

Dr. Daniel Jeremy Silver analyzes the fantastic growth of "Higher Jewish Learning." Having emerged almost overnight, like Jonah's gourd, it is fragmentary, occasionally lop-sided, generally lacking a central focus to hold it together. Is it a new kind of Torah-study? In part, yes, because it has come into being in response to the quest for identity of Jewish

students. It is not cut in the mold of Nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft*. The courses offered in some 300 colleges depend upon the special interests of the faculty people. The perspective is one of studying "about" religion, not religion itself. Nevertheless, it is a healthy, indeed a unique, blessing, with immense promise for the future of American Judaism.

Dr. Polish's essay on "Israel and Diaspora Jewry" is an excellent summary. For this very reason, an intelligent reader will feel that the author provided only an introduction to his theme. How is the modern Jew to sort out his basic values, so as to be able to deal responsibly with the loyalties that pull him in opposite directions? Which are the primary values, commanding unconditional assent? What are the contours of the emerging situation of Jewry in the world? Are the human rights of individuals at times in conflict with ethnic rights? History, in general, and Jewish history, in particular, are full of surprises. We cannot anticipate the future, but we should at least recognize the problematic and help the next generation to confront the challenges that are now beyond the horizon.

Despite all shortcomings, here is a well-written and informative collection of essays, a fine contribution to the understanding of the current scene.



Diller's anthology, *Ancient Roots and Modern Meanings*, seeks to uncover the facets of Jewish life that Martin's collection of essays disregards. While the latter work is establishmentarian, the former reveals the anguished search for meaning on the part of those who are too honest and too perspicacious to be satisfied with the old clichés. To be sure, two articles by Heschel are included, but the es-

says reflect the theologian's dream-world, not his preoccupation as a professor at the Seminary. "The Inner World of The Polish Jew" is as subjective a soliloquy as Sklare's and Glazer's sociological disquisitions are rigidly objective. Heschel's "The Mystical Element in Judaism" is an introduction to the world-view of Kabbalah, which is of interest to our searching youth, not for what it is, but because it speaks in riddles and metaphors, thereby symbolizing the *mysterium tremendum* of life.

"Brooklyn's Hasidim" are described lovingly by Jerome R. Mintz, who acknowledges their foibles and fantasies, while marvelling at their vigorous *élan* and their boldness in resisting modernism. "For the *hasidim*, however, tragedy has supernatural ramifications portending messianic redemption. It signals the culmination of a great design" (p. 32). Here is a conviction that the pro-Israel Lubavicher share with the anti-Israel Satmarer.

Maurice Friedman's essay on Elie Wiesel describes the novelist of the Holocaust as "the Job of the gas-chambers," the man who wrestles with God and obtains His blessing in the end. "To say, 'I suffer, therefore I am' is to become the enemy of man. What you must say is 'I suffer, therefore you are'" (p. 41). The logic is faulty, but the imperative is right, ethically and religiously.

Philip Mandelkorn's "A New Age Judaism" is an extremely moving autobiographical essay, detailing a spiritual odyssey that is still in progress. Some young people, feeling the hollowness of their parents' lives, set out to "find themselves" and, incidentally, also, God. Let us, who are parents, not resent their quest. According to the Midrash, God revealed Himself to Moses "in the voice of his father." We of this generation were not so fortunate.

To many of our finest children, God had to be, initially at least, where our voices could not reach them. They sought Him in drugs, in all kinds of exotica, in the dark and dangerous corners of "counter-culture," but, marvel of marvels, most of them did not lose their way. A goodly number ultimately found God and, incidentally, their parents. "God 'zapped' us with His light, and we became personally aware of His presence" (p. 62). "*Yiddishkeit* was for many a fresh spring on the long journey home." A visit to Israel and life among Hasidim helped to generate this feeling, as did even a certain meandering in the twisted by-ways of Hindu mysticism.

"Our Judaism cannot be assigned to narrow categories. It is an ongoing, open-ended *Kavannah* relationship which even now continues to design its own forms of worship and practice" (p. 73).

"Finally, we begin to understand: whoever chooses God is *chosen* by Him. These are the chosen people. We should be so chosen!"

"We have nearly reached the point where we don't *need* our Jewish identities any longer. We don't intend to turn away from all that we have been discovering, but we are coming to understand Judaism as a great and holy path — not the goal" (p. 80).

(Shades of Rosenzweig!) To lose a narcissistic self-image is to find oneself. The author concludes, "Now that we have begun to understand, probably we'll be better Jews than ever" (p. 81). We concur.

Zalman Schachter is an original. In his conversation with the editor, he tells of his tortuous pathway toward a blend of Lubavich and Yoga. Living "on the boundary," he pursued the elusive goal of experiencing the presence of God.

"I was drawn to Habad Hasidism, especially Lubavich, because of their promise that one

could attain certain mystical experiences in this life time" (p. 186). The Rebbe told him that, "All a Rebbe can do is to show you where to dig, you must do the digging yourself."

In time, Schachter became a *Guru* to many students. "Many of them have smoked dope, which means they have experienced certain expansions of the mind — certain openings . . . Others come who have had Transcendental Meditation. . . . 'Can you give me a Jewish *mantra*?' " (p. 189). How revealing of the contemporary Jewish seeker! He claims that many return to Judaism, or to Jewishness. "I am not upset by the fact that many young people come back to *Yiddishkeit* through Eastern religions. I do not believe that anyone has the exclusive Truth" (p. 190).

Whatever the situation in the "heart stuff" as he puts it, he has no difficulty in combining the number-mysticism of *Kabbalah* with various *Yogas*. Schachter is challenging, even shocking, but now and then he strikes a vibrant chord.

"A lot of people are blocked in any relationship to God because they have never been able to tell Him how angry they are with Him for the lousy trick of creating them. . . . If I cannot rail at God, I will not be able to pray to Him either, because the good stuff cannot come through with all the bad stuff in the way" (p. 198).

Arthur Waskow writes about the basic principles of Jewish politics. He begins from the beginning, "what does it mean to continue to be Jewish?" and his reply is that to be a *Yisroel* is to be a Godwrestler. "*Wrestling* is . . . that strangest of fusions, a fusion of making war and making love" (p. 246). A Manichean undertone resounds in this concept. Manifestly, there are many things in life, short of war and short of love. Is it, then, the struggle between the Augustinian

two loves — the love of self is the love of God? Referring to the book of Genesis, he writes, "It teaches us how to turn the world as it is given us — in which to be brothers means to be Cain and Abel — into the world in which Jacob and Esau were able to kiss and embrace the next morning" (p. 247).

Homiletically, it is more appropriate to foreshadow the goal by referring to the story of Joseph and his brothers. In any case, Waskow calls for "wrestling" with the tradition and, in a way, also with the "establishment," especially in so far as it slavishly obeys the politics of the Israeli government. He argues in behalf of a policy of "decentralization," with each center of Jewish life developing its own policies. As one of the founders of *Breira*, he calls for a policy of reconciliation with the Arabs and reliance on the feelings of fraternity. "We drew the sword, but we must never depend upon the sword."

Taken as a whole, *Ancient Roots and Modern Meanings* is an anthology which stresses the search for meaning more than the safety of rootedness.

Norman B. Mirsky's volume, *Unorthodox Judaism*, is a well-written series of essays on various developments in contemporary Judaism. He reflects some disillusionment with the Reform-Conservative emphasis on decorum at services. In the Orthodox *shul*, it was "perfectly proper to talk during services" (p. 16). In passing, we may point out, Jewish legalists and moralists never considered it "perfectly proper." The segregation of the sexes in the *shul* suggests to him a celebrationist mood, "like a cocktail-party." Modern Judaism "lacks a body" he claims; we have become overly westernized.

With all this nostalgia, the author is aware that Reform fulfills the

role of a vanguard in a moving camp. This role implies certain obligations in the area of mixed marriages. Even the Atlanta Resolution, condemning mixed marriages (1973), allowed an exception if the non-Jew undertook a "course of study in Judaism." A still more positive attitude is needed, according to the author, if the mixed couple and their progeny are to be won for Judaism.

"Unless one is concerned with genetic purity, intermarriage in itself need be no threat. . . . The major threat lies in the quality, not the quantity of Jewish life. . . . In addition, Jews must be reeducated or reconditioned (and here the so-called counterculture helps) so that they are able to be emotionally demonstrative, not afraid of challenging God or Jewish institutions, not afraid of expressing joy or sorrow, love and hate. . . . If the rise in intermarriage goads us into attempting to seek solutions to Jewish marginality, it could be one of the strange ways in which God seeks to bless the Jews" (pp. 50, 51).

The author is not enthusiastic about the ordaining of women to be rabbis. He suggests that, in our culture, the image of the clergy is already feminized. A number of forces are at work which, taken together, might lead to a general feeling "that being a rabbi is no job for a Jewish boy" (p. 79).

The author examines the day-school trend, the "Jews for Jesus" movement, the "ignostic" babble in Detroit and the *Makom* experiment in Chicago. The last named community is a kind of anti-establishmentarian synagogue and center, sponsored by the Establishment. It satisfies the ambivalence of our youth, who want to rebel and to find their "roots" at one and the same time. More such efforts are needed. There is a deep unsatisfied need for community in a large segment of our youth. At a


Sabbath service in *Makom*, we are told, "those in attendance were singing, clapping their hands and hugging one another by the end of the evening."

It helps to remember that the conventicles of the Hasidim (their *Kloislach*) were similarly marked by displays of affection and even out-

bursts of levity (*sich iberkulien*).

All in all, these four books leave one with the feeling that "the Eternal One of Israel will not prove false."

JACOB B. AGUS is rabbi of Beth El Congregation, Baltimore, Md.



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On renewed interest in Judaica among young Americans: "The young people perceived themselves as survivors of the failures of Jewish education and the false values of America." Sylvia Rothchild.

On Israel's Nature Reserves: "It may be that General Yoffe's animals will somehow lead the people of the Middle East to peace one day. But the tanks were in the mountains, waiting. The real beast in the desert was still man." Robert Spero.



On being a Jewish poet: "The truest Jewish poetry will be written out of the inward preoccupations of people who happen to be Jews." M. L. Rosenthal.

On the Persian Gulf arms race: "The ramifications of what is happening... extend from the Caspian Sea to the Suez Canal and from the African Coast to Pakistan." Tad Szulc.

On Israel's Arab intellectuals: "I am an Israeli but I cannot be a Jew." Naomi Shepherd.

On American foreign policy: "American companies, which for

so long we have considered 'our companies,' have in fact become the policing agents of the Arabs' boycott against the U.S." Paul Dickson.

On South Africa: "To live with such a system of laws, with certificates of racial purity, with leaders who admired Hitler, to live in South Africa as a Jew and to be silent and happy takes some special skills." Rose Moss.

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